

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Wednesday 6 September 2006

Session 2

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SCOTTISH MINISTERS AND DEPUTY MINISTERS

FIRST MINISTER—Right hon Jack McConnell MSP
DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER—Nicol Stephen MSP

Justice

MINISTER FOR JUSTICE—Cathy Jamieson MSP
DEPUTY MINISTER FOR JUSTICE—Hugh Henry MSP

Education and Young People

MINISTER FOR EDUCATION AND YOUNG PEOPLE—Peter Peacock MSP
DEPUTY MINISTER FOR EDUCATION AND YOUNG PEOPLE—Robert Brown MSP

Enterprise and Lifelong Learning

MINISTER FOR ENTERPRISE AND LIFELONG LEARNING—Nicol Stephen MSP
DEPUTY MINISTER FOR ENTERPRISE AND LIFELONG LEARNING—Allan Wilson MSP

Environment and Rural Development

MINISTER FOR ENVIRONMENT AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT—Ross Finnie MSP
DEPUTY MINISTER FOR ENVIRONMENT AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT—Rhona Brankin MSP

Finance and Public Service Reform

MINISTER FOR FINANCE AND PUBLIC SERVICE REFORM—Mr Tom McCabe MSP
DEPUTY MINISTER FOR FINANCE AND PUBLIC SERVICE REFORM—George Lyon MSP

Health and Community Care

MINISTER FOR HEALTH AND COMMUNITY CARE—Mr Andy Kerr MSP
DEPUTY MINISTER FOR HEALTH AND COMMUNITY CARE—Lewis Macdonald MSP

Parliamentary Business

MINISTER FOR PARLIAMENTARY BUSINESS—Ms Margaret Curran MSP
DEPUTY MINISTER FOR PARLIAMENTARY BUSINESS—George Lyon MSP

Communities

MINISTER FOR COMMUNITIES—Malcolm Chisholm MSP
DEPUTY MINISTER FOR COMMUNITIES—Johann Lamont MSP

Tourism, Culture and Sport

MINISTER FOR TOURISM, CULTURE AND SPORT—Patricia Ferguson MSP

Transport

MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT—Tavish Scott MSP

Law Officers

LORD ADVOCATE—Right hon Lord Colin Boyd QC
SOLICITOR GENERAL FOR SCOTLAND—Mrs Elish Angiolini QC

PRESIDING OFFICERS

PRESIDING OFFICER—Right hon George Reid MSP
DEPUTY PRESIDING OFFICERS—Trish Godman MSP, Murray Tosh MSP

SCOTTISH PARLIAMENTARY CORPORATE BODY

PRESIDING OFFICER—Right hon George Reid MSP
MEMBERS—Mr Kenny MacAskill MSP, Mr Duncan McNeil MSP, Nora Radcliffe MSP, John Scott MSP

PARLIAMENTARY BUREAU

PRESIDING OFFICER—Right hon George Reid MSP
MEMBERS—Bill Aitken MSP, Chris Ballance MSP, Ms Margaret Curran MSP, Margo MacDonald MSP, Alasdair Morgan MSP, George Lyon MSP

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Subordinate Legislation	Dr Sylvia Jackson	Gordon Jackson

6 September 2006

Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 6 September 2006

[THE PRESIDING OFFICER *opened the meeting at 14:00*]

Time for Reflection

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): Good afternoon and welcome back. The first item of business is time for reflection, which is led today by the Rev Roddy MacRae of Glenelg and Kintail parish church.

The Rev Roddy MacRae (Glenelg and Kintail Parish Church): Frederick the Great, the Prussian army hero, once said: “The more I get to know people, the more I like my dog.”

Just thinking about that, we who are involved with people all the time realise that many of our problems are stimulated by people. If we had no people problems, we would have few problems at all. It would be a great life. We would have no misunderstandings, no harsh demands, no quarrels, fights, criticisms or complaints. It would be a great place to be.

I read a story about a young puppy dog that spoke to an old dog—I bet that you did not know that dogs can speak, but they are intelligent animals. The young dog said, “I have mastered philosophy. I have learned that the best thing for a dog is happiness, and that happiness is in my tail. Therefore, I am chasing it. And when I catch it, I shall have it.” The old dog replied, “I, too, have judged that happiness is a marvellous thing for a dog, and that happiness indeed resides in my tail. But I’ve noticed that when I chase my tail, it keeps running away from me, but when I go about my business, it comes after me.”

As ministers—both political and religious—we try to make people happy. I have no doubt that, as you do so, you often find that the period of happiness is very short. The reason for that is that the focus for that happiness is very temporary, as it is about here and now. I firmly believe that Jesus wants us to discover a true happiness, not only for the body but for the soul. I believe that God wants us to know a love beyond any love that this world knows and a peace beyond our understanding. He wants us to be able to live in his grace and to understand what that means for us, both right now and for life everlasting. When we get that right, we can deal with people problems in a different light. We learn that people problems are opportunities to serve.

I believe that, if we leave God out of the equation, we will just keep chasing our tail.

However, with him as the foundation of your life, goodness and mercy and real joy will follow you. One of the disciples of Jesus said, “Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?” Jesus responded, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

We can learn a lot from how Jesus dealt with people. Not only was Jesus the ultimate servant, he achieved something spectacular for us. He made a way for us, so that we can know God and be loved by God and be complete and know forgiveness and newness of life—a life beyond our wildest dreams.

I hope that you will go forward with that knowledge as you serve the public. I pray that you will have God in the right place, so that the rest will follow you.

God bless you.

Business Motion

14:04

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S2M-4752, in the name of Margaret Curran, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees the following programme of business—

Wednesday 6 September 2006

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Executive Debate: Future of Scotland

followed by Business Motion

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 7 September 2006

9.15 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Executive Debate: Education First

11.40 am General Question Time

12 noon First Minister's Question Time

2.15 pm Themed Question Time—Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning; Justice and Law Officers

2.55 pm Stage 1 Debate: Legal Profession and Legal Aid (Scotland) Bill

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 13 September 2006

2.30 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by SPCB Motion on the Reappointment of the Deputy Ombudsmen

followed by Stage 1 Debate: Adoption and Children (Scotland) Bill

followed by Financial Resolution: Adoption and Children (Scotland) Bill

followed by Business Motion

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 14 September 2006

9.15 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by

11.40 am

12 noon

2.15 pm

2.55 pm

followed by

followed by

5.00 pm

followed by

Wednesday 20 September 2006

2.30 pm

followed by

followed by

followed by

followed by

5.00 pm

followed by

Thursday 21 September 2006

9.15 am

followed by

11.40 am

12 noon

2.15 pm

2.55 pm

followed by

5.00 pm

followed by

Curran.]

Motion agreed to.

Scottish National Party Business

General Question Time

First Minister's Question Time

Themed Question Time—Education and Young People, Tourism, Culture and Sport; Finance and Public Services and Communities

Stage 1 Debate: Criminal Proceedings etc. (Reform) (Scotland) Bill

Financial Resolution: Criminal Proceedings etc. (Reform) (Scotland) Bill

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

Decision Time

Members' Business

Time for Reflection

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

Health Committee Debate: 10th Report 2006, Care Inquiry

Business Motion

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

Decision Time

Members' Business

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

Executive Business

General Question Time

First Minister's Question Time

Themed Question Time—Environment and Rural Development; Health and Community Care

Executive Business

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

Decision Time

Members' Business—[Ms Margaret

Future of Scotland

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): The next item of business is a debate on motion S2M-4746, in the name of Jack McConnell, on the future of Scotland. I call on the First Minister to speak to and move the motion.

14:05

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): Before I start the debate, I want to say a few words about the tragic events in Afghanistan at the weekend. I know that everyone in the chamber will want to join me in sending our deepest sympathies to the families of those servicemen based in Kinloss who were killed at the weekend, and to the families of those other individuals who have died giving service to their country in recent weeks. We can only imagine the shock and sorrow felt by those families and by the wider community at this time. It is a great loss for all concerned, and I know that this Parliament will be united in conveying our condolences.

The Presiding Officer: I have spoken to the leaders of the other parties that are represented on the Parliamentary Bureau, and to Richard Lochhead, the constituency member, and they have asked me to place on record the fact that they too share the sentiments of the First Minister. The whole Parliament therefore conveys its sympathy and condolences to the families affected by that tragic event.

The First Minister: I am pleased to open this debate on the future of Scotland at the end of a summer that has seen hundreds of thousands of visitors enjoying Scotland's good weather and record-breaking festivals and events. Scotland's visitor attractions have been busier than usual, Scottish culture—traditional and non-traditional—has been displayed to greater numbers in every part of Scotland, our beaches and countryside have stunned thousands, and Scotland's pubs, clubs and restaurants have, for the first time ever, been smoke free.

This is a great time to visit, study, live, or work in Scotland, but today's debate is very deliberately about the future and about the choices that face us in the months and years ahead—choices that will determine the shape of our society, the nature of our economy and the state of our environment two decades from now. We are entering the most creative time in democratic politics, when political parties fight for the hearts and minds of voters and attempt to win the battle of ideas. It is, as it should be, an exciting time to be a member of Scotland's Parliament.

I want to be absolutely clear about this Government's record and to report to the people of

Scotland not just on what we have done, but on the results.

First, this Government's first priority is to grow the Scottish economy. We have cut business rates and invested in colleges and universities; we have built and are building new railways; we have bought new trains, opened new stations and supported dozens of new international air routes. We have aggressively promoted Scottish companies overseas and attracted new workers to boost the labour market. The result is that Scotland's economy has grown around or above trend rate since the previous election. We have the highest employment rate in the United Kingdom and we are closer to full employment than almost anyone in Europe.

Secondly, I want to talk about education. There are brand new school buildings, more teachers, smaller class sizes, top-quality nursery places for every three and four-year-old, and higher expectations for excellence in the classroom. The result is that attainment in Scottish schools is rising, with international comparisons now showing that Scottish 15-year-olds are among the best performing in the world in maths, literacy and science.

Thirdly, I want to mention health. There is increased investment, more nurses, more doctors, more consultants, better buildings and equipment, and a focus on the killer diseases. We are also leading the UK on hospital cleanliness and infection. The results continue to defy the critics. Once again, we have the best waiting time performance ever, and deaths from heart disease, stroke and cancer are down.

Fourthly, on crime, there are new powers to tackle antisocial behaviour, more police and more community wardens to back them up, and an improved, effective court system. The result is that crime is down—recorded crime is down another 5 per cent in the past 12 months—that clear-up rates are up and that communities are fighting back against the misery of antisocial behaviour.

Perhaps the biggest result of all is that, through working in partnership with Westminster, the number of Scots living in poverty has been cut—particularly the number of children. Since the Tories left office, nearly 250,000 Scottish children have been lifted from absolute poverty, reducing absolute child poverty by 65 per cent. Crucially, the gap has narrowed too as the number of children living in relative poverty has been cut by a third.

Yet there are some who wonder what the Scottish Parliament has achieved. Without this Parliament and this Government, Scotland could never have been the first place in the United Kingdom to implement a smoking ban, or the first

place in the UK to have comprehensive enterprise education in every classroom for every child. Project Scotland, a national full-time volunteering scheme for young people, would not have been created, nor would recycling have been increased from 5 per cent to 23 per cent. We would not be able proudly to boast that our school pupils get the best school dinners in the UK.

Who would have signed a co-operation agreement with Malawi if this Parliament—or, for that matter, this Government—did not exist? Who would have stood up to promote multiculturalism or welcome hard-working migrants to Scotland?

The fact is that Scotland is a far better place than it was before devolution and it is a better place than it was in 2003, too. Frankly, I do not believe for a second that the vast majority of that would have been delivered had anyone else been sitting in these Government seats.

That record is the starting point for today's debate. Seven years into devolution, we are a stable and mature Parliament and Government. Now is the time to consider not what has held us back for the past 20 years, but what will take us forward in the next 20 years. Two years ago, the Scottish Government set up a futures project. Along with others, including the Parliament's own futures forum, which is led by the Presiding Officer, we are building a better understanding of what Scotland must do to succeed and prosper 20 years from now.

The futures project is not trying to predict the future with certainty; it is about Scotland's place and positioning. To determine our place, we conducted a strategic audit to benchmark Scotland internationally. The strategic audit shows that Scotland compares very well internationally on some indicators, such as education and research; that we are mid ranking on many; and that we compare poorly on a few. Some in the chamber will cherry pick the worst of those statistics to run down Scotland—they do so at every opportunity—but doing so misses the point. No country can claim that everything is good or that everything is bad. We should be more honest than that.

To me, the evidence demonstrates clearly that poverty and inequality are at the root of Scotland's greatest weaknesses. Despite the significant progress that has been made in cutting poverty in recent years, we must remain resolved to abolish child poverty by 2020.

The second part of the project sets out the likely trends that may continue or emerge in the next 20 years. Our job is to ensure that Scotland is best positioned to respond to trends such as globalisation, trends in governance, sustainability, employment, technology and others. Those trends paint a complex picture.

Nicola Sturgeon (Glasgow) (SNP): I know that the First Minister, as a unionist, will have a view on this matter. The reality is that while we in this Parliament rightly debate the future of Scotland, most people in the First Minister's party are interested only in the future of Tony Blair. Does the First Minister still back Tony Blair to remain in office or, like a growing number of people in his own party and throughout the country, does he think that it is time for him to go?

The First Minister: There are two choices in Scotland today. We can talk about abolishing child poverty and reducing the number of children in child poverty by working in partnership with the Government in the United Kingdom, or we can make cheap party-political points and fail to deal with it altogether.

We can be relatively certain of an increasing pace of technological change, an increasingly knowledge-based economy, growing disposable incomes and more consumer choice. While the global economy marches on, we can expect an increasing pressure on primary resources and on the environment. We can also be certain of comparatively low birth rates and a population that lives longer but is not necessarily healthier. It is likely that more people will live on their own and that families may be less stable with more transitions.

The strategic audit identifies the current target that we need to aim for: eliminating poverty. However, the trends papers show that the target will be a moving one. We need to move with it. The project as a whole tells us to expect momentous change in the next 20 years, which indicates that we need to make choices now about how to ensure that Scotland can compete. That work has been widely published and is recognised as a model of its kind.

Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP): Will the First Minister give way?

The First Minister: I have already given way to a Scottish National Party member—I will let Mr Swinney in in a second.

Ultimately, such analysis must lead us to conclusions and to some fundamental choices. There is little doubt that globalisation is the megatrend that has the potential to eclipse all other trends. We can expect ever-greater global connections in the next 20 years in knowledge transfer, greater movements of people and more trading of goods and services. As our world becomes smaller, however, there is increasing global uncertainty from terrorism, increasing tensions between different ways of life and the threat of pandemics in an interdependent world. As the futures project has shown, the security challenge is more likely to increase than to

diminish. So, values will increasingly matter too. The job of Scotland's politicians—on all sides—is to lead and to promote tolerance and respect for different people, their cultures and their religions.

Richard Lochhead (Moray) (SNP): In talking about Scotland's safe future, does the First Minister agree with the Scottish National Party that Scotland's future should be a nuclear-free future?

The First Minister: I think that Mr Lochhead misses my fundamental point, which is that for the challenge and the opportunity of increasing interdependence, the task for Scotland's Parliament and Government is to equip Scots with the skills that are globally useful—skills in languages, technology and science. Whatever the future may throw up at us, it is clear to me that knowledge and skills are the primary way to enhance Scotland's competitive advantage over the next 20 years and beyond. An educated population will be able to adapt and respond better to the challenges and opportunities of that future.

My absolute conclusion is that continuous, high-quality learning and education have to be Scotland's strategy for the future. Our history and our instincts tell us that learning is the best tool that we have with which to improve the life chances of all Scots. Education is the purest form of investment—an investment in human potential. Education is an escape route out of poverty. It opens up choices and opportunities for people. It can break the link between the life chances of the parents and those of the child. Education is the only investment that drives all things. It drives productivity and economic prosperity, and it promotes social cohesion and cultural development.

Scotland has one of the best education systems in the world, but we need it to be the best so that it is a truly world-class system that will serve people throughout their lives. Our ambition is to have the best education system in the world by 2020.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Is the First Minister aware of today's criticism of the education system by CBI Scotland? It says that many school leavers do not fit the bill in terms of the skills that they require for the workplace and that employers have to pick up the bill for remedial education.

The First Minister: I am pleased that the CBI has said today both that we have made progress in education and that we have identified the issues that we have to tackle in the years to come. I seriously hope that the Conservatives and the nationalists will think again and ensure that they commit to the commitments that we have given to invest in education and make the changes that are very much in line with the issues that the CBI has identified today.

We must finish the job that we have started and build upon it. We must complete the school building programme—not bring it to an end—to ensure that our school buildings are the best in the world. We will train more teachers so that Scotland's teaching profession is the best in the world. We need even more vocational options in schools, so that young Scots have the best choices in the world. We can drive up standards and aspirations through more schools of ambition. We will support Scottish universities and colleges, which are already among the best in the world. Moreover, we must stay true to our commitment: reducing the number of young Scots who are not in education, employment or training is, and has to be, a national priority.

Scotland faces a choice of two futures. For three centuries, a proud nation has chosen to unite with its neighbour, never once losing one ounce of its pride, sense of heritage, patriotism or distinctiveness, but playing a massive part in the culture, science and public affairs of the United Kingdom. Now that is overlaid with home rule and a Scottish Parliament that has sole charge of those matters that are best handled here, while Scots who are elected to Westminster continue to influence those matters that are best handled there. Scotland can choose to continue that path and its heritage of leadership of the UK, of providing Cabinet ministers, sporting heroes, academic brilliance, broadcasters and all the other opportunities that the UK gives Scots and which have enabled Scots to enrich Britain.

Within the security of Britain's macroeconomy, with a global influence that cannot be ignored and with continued leadership on international development, we can continue to turn around our national health, make our communities safer and support Scottish families in their aspirations to own a home, travel and combine parenthood with a fulfilling career. Above all, we have the power, the resources and the imagination to create the best education system in the world. We can do all that without losing one iota of what makes us a nation.

Alternatively, Scotland can choose a different path. We can spend years debating the merits of statehood, while businesses withdraw and financial institutions stall. We can spend further years disputing the minutiae of divorce—from central banks and pension funds to broadcasters and passports. We can contemplate leaving the G8 and the Security Council, and have a much reduced say in Europe with an economy at the whim of a product whose price volatility we see all too clearly today. Each and every step on that path would distract us from Scotland's greatest mission—to give every young Scot the opportunity of having the best education in the world.

I welcome a debate about the future of our nation. I want what is best for Scotland—my Scotland—and I repudiate those who argue that only separatists are true patriots. The patriotic choice for Scotland is to do the right thing for our children and their future.

There is nothing more satisfying or inspiring than to see a young mind grasp opportunities for learning, or to see a young person learn basic knowledge, develop creative skills, realise the potential of cultural experiences, and become more confident, more understanding and more ambitious as a result. I want that for all Scotland's children.

Learning is Scotland's strategy for the future. It changes lives, lifts people out of poverty and widens horizons. It will make our small nation stronger in a difficult and challenging world. The best small country in the world should have the best education system in the world, and with the right decisions and the right choices we can have that within our grasp again.

I move,

That the Parliament welcomes the publication of the Futures Project work; recognises the key achievements of the past four years; acknowledges the importance, over the next 20 years, of securing the benefits from our older population, developing and maintaining a strong niche in the global economy and, above all else, promoting a thirst for knowledge and a passion for learning to help secure opportunity for all; notes the opportunities that exist for Scotland, within the United Kingdom, to build on the stability of the current constitutional arrangements, while using devolution to secure a competitive advantage and give Scots a better quality of life, and agrees that the best way for Scottish government to achieve this ambition and deliver a healthy, prosperous and sustainable future for the people of Scotland is to bring its devolved powers fully to bear rather than focussing on arguments over separation from the United Kingdom.

14:21

Nicola Sturgeon (Glasgow) (SNP): I am delighted to lead for the SNP in this debate about Scotland's future, because the best future for Scotland and the Scottish people is independence.

I do not think that Jack McConnell actually believes all the scaremongering rubbish that he has just spouted and has been spouting for the past few days. Let us remember, Mr McConnell is just following orders. Gone is the nationalism lite and back is that tired old London Labour strategy. When all else fails, Labour's job—as Douglas Alexander so memorably put it—is to engender fear. Tomorrow Gordon Brown will be in town. Unless he is just gathering signatures for the “Blair must go” letter, that can only mean a pep talk for the First Minister.

The problem for London Labour is this: the politics of fear has had its day. People can see

through the fears and the smears—especially when they come from a Government that lied about taking this country to war. It is time in Scotland for a positive debate about the future—a debate based on facts and not on Labour fiction.

Before Mr McConnell next insults the intelligence of the Scottish people on the question of independence, he should reflect on some simple facts. Ireland, Iceland and Norway are all in the top six richest countries in the world. Devolved Scotland is 18th. Those countries all have higher growth rates than Scotland—but then, they all have lower corporation tax too, a policy that this Parliament is powerless to implement. The citizens of those countries are wealthier than ours. Fewer of their young people are not in work, education or training. What else do Norway, Ireland and Iceland have in common? Yes, that is right—in the course of the 20th century they all secured their independence.

The risk to Scotland's future is not independence; the risk is staying locked in a system that tells us that we are subsidy junkies and which forces us to compete with one hand tied behind our back. That is the biggest risk to Scotland's future.

Independence is the big opportunity for Scotland's future. Independence is the opportunity to compete. Independence is the opportunity to match the successes of our neighbours and not to trail in their wake. Independence is the opportunity to raise the living standards and the expectations of all Scots, but—

Mr Charlie Gordon (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab): Will the member take an intervention?

Christine May (Central Fife) (Lab): Will the member take an intervention?

Nicola Sturgeon: I am spoiled for choice.

Christine May: Nicola Sturgeon talks about allowing people to take advantage of choices, but perhaps she can explain why she has failed to persuade her London-based leader to include anything about education in his first 100 days pledges, when education is what will provide genuine choice.

Nicola Sturgeon: Alex Salmond, my leader, will be back in the Parliament running the Scottish education system next May and he will be sitting in Jack McConnell's seat as First Minister.

Independence is an opportunity for Scotland, but Labour still tells us that we are not up to it and that Scotland, uniquely, is incapable of succeeding as an independent country. That is a shameful way of attempting to cling, desperately, to office.

All the scaremongering serves another purpose for Labour—it nicely masks the fact that it has

nothing original to say. Mr McConnell tells us that education is fundamental to our future; it is as if he has just discovered that fact, despite having been in office for such a long time.

Last week, Labour published a 28-page document, which contains not a single new policy idea. It includes many dubious claims about what Labour has done, but nothing about what a re-elected Labour Government would do. Labour has run out of ideas. That is why more and more people in Scotland think that it is time for a change. Only the Scottish National Party can deliver such a change, so let me set out the facts of what people can expect from an SNP Government led by Alex Salmond as First Minister.

The First Minister: In laying out the set of proposals that she is about to give us, will Ms Sturgeon tell us what she will say to those companies that are considering making an investment somewhere in Europe, perhaps in Scotland, which would wonder for at least three years of an SNP Government what the future would hold for them under her proposal for an independence referendum? When she outlines her proposals, will she include an explanation of how she would fill the fiscal hole and meet the list of promises that her front-bench team made over the summer to spend £100 million here, £150 million there and £100 million somewhere else, in spite of which Mr Mather still goes round the country promising tax cuts that the SNP could never afford? Will she outline those facts for us today?

Nicola Sturgeon: Does it never strike the First Minister that what he says now is exactly what the Tories said before the devolution referendum? They were talking Scotland down then and the First Minister is talking Scotland down now.

Our party believes in independence for our country and for everyone who lives in it. The freedom to control our own destiny and to reach our full potential is as important for Scotland's people as it is for the nation. That is why an SNP Government will tackle head on the barriers that prevent too many people from reaching their full potential. We will not wait until we have been in office for 10 years—as Mr McConnell has done—to notice that there is a literacy and numeracy problem in our schools. Instead, we will take action to cut class sizes and to ensure that the curriculum gives kids the skills that they need in both today's economy and tomorrow's.

We will tackle the problem of rising student debt. When the Parliament opened for business in 1999, average student loan debt was £2,500. Today, under Labour and the Liberal Democrats, it is £11,000 and rising. Student debt prices too many people from low-income backgrounds out of education and restricts the choices of those

students who are lucky enough to get a degree. One does not have to stop and think for very long to realise that a graduate with £11,000 of debt will find it much harder than one without such a debt to buy a home, start a business or save for their retirement. Student debt is unsustainable and it is bad economics. An SNP Government will restore the free education from which Mr McConnell and Mr Stephen benefited.

We will deal with the unfairness of the council tax. I say to Mr McCabe that we will do that not by way of a bribe in a pre-election year, as Labour is doing, but by introducing a fair system that gives pensioners in particular a better deal.

As part of our wider economic strategy to give Scotland a real competitive edge, we will abolish business rates for 120,000 small businesses and give higher relief to a further 30,000. That is real help that will let small businesses grow.

Those are just some of the policies that people can expect from an SNP Government. People can also expect an SNP Government to stand up and be counted when it matters. There will be no sitting on the fence on nuclear power and nuclear weapons; no collusion in illegal wars; and no cowering in the corner when Scottish airports are being used to transport American bombs to the middle east. Instead, people can expect strong Scottish voices that will put Scottish interests first at all times. An SNP Government will give the Scottish people the chance to move forward to independence and to give our Parliament the same powers as every other self-respecting Parliament in the world. Unlike Labour, we trust the Scottish people to make that decision.

It is time for big ideas, not Labour's low ambition. It is time to be positive about what Scotland can do. It is time for a Government and a First Minister who will truly stand up for Scotland.

I move amendment S2M-4746.2, to leave out from "recognises" to end and insert:

"and agrees with its assessment that many key economic drivers are outwith the influence of devolved government and that as a devolved nation Scotland may find it increasingly difficult to assert influence within an enlarged European Union; considers that Scotland needs an ambitious government that will tackle barriers to individual fulfilment, such as child poverty and educational underachievement, rising graduate debt, the unfairness of the council tax and the burden of rates on small businesses; further considers that a new Scottish government must be ready to fight Scotland's corner on issues such as Trident and nuclear power and not run for cover, like the current one, when matters of UK foreign policy require to be challenged, and believes that, to create a competitive, growing economy that will generate wealth, boost employment and raise living standards for all, Scotland badly needs the same powers of independence that other countries take for granted."

14:31

Miss Annabel Goldie (West of Scotland)

(Con): The topic of today's debate fills me with a great sense of optimism—not for any of the reasons that the First Minister has outlined today, but for the quite different reason that we will, in the not-too-distant future, be facing Scottish Parliament and local government elections in which it is likely that the Labour Party will suffer a bloody nose and be kicked from power not only in the Scottish Parliament but in councils the length and breadth of the country, where Labour has let down the Scottish public.

The First Minister may argue to the contrary; indeed, he may point to the document that he published last week in which an alleged 283 results that Labour has delivered in Scotland were cited—if only our football team could achieve equivalent success. One has only to make a quick scan of the document for the cracks to appear. I will refer to a couple of beauties.

First, result number 12, which is headed, "Labour reduced business rates". Although the Executive has finally conceded the argument and reluctantly begun to reduce business rates, it was the First Minister who put up business rates in the first place. In truth, the alleged result should have read, "Labour has cost Scottish businesses an additional £838 million by increasing business rates above the English level." What an achievement.

Secondly, result number 167 is interestingly headed:

"Conditions for bail ... tightened up"

and

"the intention to end automatic early release."

Again, that is a glittering demonstration of the Executive's spin machine. The Executive has made bail easier. It did so first in 2000, when the ban on certain categories of alleged offenders receiving bail was removed and bail became easier, and again in 2004, when the Executive allowed individuals who were initially refused bail to be released with tags.

The First Minister has a cheek to even mention automatic early release. The Conservative party has given Parliament four opportunities to end that ludicrous practice. On every occasion, Labour, the Lib Dems and the Scottish National Party voted against ending it—small wonder that public confidence in the criminal justice system has been shattered.

Although I could comment on many more failings, today's debate is about Scotland's future and not her past. At the end of the day, despite massive increases in spending—there have been massive increases in spending—the Scottish

Government under Labour and the Lib Dems has failed to deliver improvements for Scotland. We are still lagging behind the rest of the United Kingdom in terms of economic growth; crimes and offences are significantly higher than they were in 1999; waiting lists are longer and waiting times are higher; business start-ups are down; households in temporary accommodation are up; and attacks on school staff are up. That is not a record of which to be proud.

However, an important point must be made: the failures that I have described are the fault not of devolution but of Labour and the Liberal Democrats, who have attempted to control and micromanage everything from the centre, from ring fencing local authority grants to introducing targets on school exclusion. That is the main reason why we are not witnessing improvements in our public services.

For example, the recent scrapping of school boards wrested statutory representation from parents and fobbed them off with parental involvement. The Executive has put in place so many targets in the national health service in Scotland that our clinicians have to prioritise treatment of wisdom teeth over treatment of cancer so that they can meet the targets—many people find that to be beyond belief.

The Minister for Health and Community Care

(Mr Andy Kerr): Is the member aware of my correspondence with the individuals involved in the case to which she refers? No evidence could be found to support her claim. Will she take time to congratulate NHS staff and everyone in the service, who have brought this nation the best-ever results on NHS waiting times?

Miss Goldie: I am not privy to the correspondence to which the minister referred, but no doubt he will copy it to me. However, I am relaying to him the picture of the national health service that the people of Scotland see. People are experiencing a health service in which many traditional local services are being wrenched from their grasp. People—including pregnant women—are being told to travel unacceptable distances for essential services that they have a right to access locally.

Is it any wonder that the people of Scotland feel indifferent to and take little pride in our Parliament? With seven years of failure behind them, Labour and the Lib Dems have forfeited the right to govern again.

I listened with interest to Nicola Sturgeon's speech. She declared proudly that the Scottish National Party will "stand up and be counted when it matters", but the SNP has managed to oppose only six Executive bills in seven years—yet it calls

itself the Opposition and masquerades as an alternative to the Government.

Bruce Crawford (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): During the summer, I was interested to read a short article in *The Scotsman*, entitled, "Tories say 'we'll save devolution'". However, during the summer recess Peter Duncan sent a note to all prospective Tory candidates, which said that they should laud the idea that we should decapitate and neuter the Scottish Parliament by reducing the number of its members to 108. How does the member square that comment with the Tories' belief that they can make devolution work?

Miss Goldie: I do not remember being a recipient of that colourful missive, but Mr Crawford might know more than I do. It is understandable that he should want to deflect attention from his party's performance in the Scottish Parliament. The public will find it strange that the party that claims to have been the principal Opposition in this Parliament has been so weak-kneed and limp in opposing the Executive's proposed legislation.

Shona Robison (Dundee East) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Miss Goldie: I have already given way and I need to make progress.

Most people do not want to be rid of the Scottish Parliament, but they want the problems of the past seven years to be fixed and they want Parliament to work better and to be less extravagant. They want Parliament to deliver better public services for all the people of Scotland, so that they can take pride in it while remaining part of Britain. The Conservatives are committed to delivering those improvements and to building a confident Scottish Parliament within a strong Britain. We want more power to be returned to local people and we want to instigate real public sector reform and provide better value for money. We will take Scottish Water out of the public sector, because that is the only way to provide a manageable service to the public in an effective, efficient and cost-bearable manner.

Conservatives will provide more police and we will increase accountability and transparency in the police. We will publish regular local crime statistics and we will put toughness back into sentencing.

Christine May: Will the member give way?

Miss Goldie: The member must forgive me, but I am short of time.

We will argue that parents and teachers should be empowered to run schools. We will endeavour to ensure that they have a proper sense of ownership and governance in schools and that head teachers can tackle indiscipline. We will give Scotland a coherent and effective strategy to deal

with drug abuse. We will scrap centrally imposed targets in our health service and instead put clinical decisions in the hands of doctors, not ministers.

On Mr Crawford's point, we will continue to argue for a reduction in the number of members of the Scottish Parliament to 108, as the Scotland Act 1998 intended. That is not a recipe for a weakened Parliament; it is a recipe for a more effective and leaner Parliament that focuses on the priorities of people, not those of politicians. The public will find that to be an acceptable way forward for Parliament—after all, they pay for it. If we really are concerned about value for money for the taxpayer, we must start by setting an example with politicians.

Labour and the Lib Dems have let us down. They were trusted with the devolution project, but they risk losing it to the Scottish National Party, which wants only to wreck devolution. The Scottish Tories have a more positive and honourable vision. We will deliver a Scottish Parliament with the policies that Scotland needs and which its people deserve, while creating a strong relationship with Westminster. With that recipe, real devolution lies ahead and a meaningful Parliament, of which the people of Scotland can be proud, can be created.

I move amendment S2M-4746.1, to leave out from "welcomes" to "four years" and insert:

"notes that since devolution the gap between the poor and the rich has widened, waiting lists and times are going up, crime is getting worse, council tax has increased by 60% and economic growth is lagging behind England; recognises that these problems are not the fault of devolution, but are the fault of the Labour and Liberal Democrat Scottish Executive; believes that, to make devolution work, more power and responsibility need to be returned to people and local communities, real public sector reform needs to be instigated and better value for money needs to be provided;"

14:41

Shiona Baird (North East Scotland) (Green): The Scotland that my grandchildren and great-grandchildren will live in will be determined by the actions of the people who are in this chamber now. The debate is about the here and now. It is depressing to hear Scotland's constitutional future being portrayed as a simplistic choice between divorce and marital bliss, in the Punch and Judy act between Labour and the SNP. We all know that the matter is more complex than that. No matter which choice we make about the constitution, it is our other choices that will most profoundly determine our future, whether as part of the United Kingdom or as a full member of the world community in our own right.

Christine May: Will Shiona Baird give way?

Shiona Baird: No. Just give me a chance.

Never mind the constitution. The Executive is not even using its current powers and influence nearly well enough.

The First Minister: For the sake of clarity, we know that the SNP has been trying to hide its policy of independence and that it has been forced to include that policy in its amendment today, but can we be clear about the Green party's policy on the matter, as its amendment does not mention it?

Shiona Baird: The First Minister should listen to what I am saying—the issue is about more than independence. I want to talk about the kind of Scotland that we want, which will be determined by what we do right now, such as how we treat our people, including those in this chamber, how we treat our environment, and the kind of economy that we are building. If we are to build a Scotland that is fit for the future, it must by definition be sustainable in every way.

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): Will the member give way?

Shiona Baird: No. I must proceed.

Many people seem to have trouble with the word “sustainable”. It is not that difficult—it means able to be sustained. If resources are finite, we cannot base our future on their everlasting exploitation. Sustainability does not mean until the next election or even the one after that; it means indefinitely. If policies cannot achieve that, they are not sustainable and have no place in the business of responsible government.

There is a three-legged stool that is made up of social justice, the environment and the economy. To have just two of the three legs will not do, because the stool will topple over. We cannot treat any of the factors in isolation, because they are interlinked in ways that too many politicians fail to grasp. Let us unpick the threads a little. The people of Scotland have the absolute right to live in dignity, respected by the Government and by society at large. However, in recent years, that respect has started to look a little threadbare. We have communities living in blighted landscapes, such as the villagers of Greengairs. Jack McConnell will remember them, because he went there once. They were promised environmental justice, but it seems that, under the Executive, big business comes first.

Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con): Will the member give way?

Shiona Baird: No—I must keep going.

Today, Greengairs is more blighted than ever. Greens will stick up for communities and ensure that their voices are heard.

We are throwing away valuable resources and dumping them in holes in the ground, which causes social blight while polluting our environment. That is an economic issue. A sustainable waste policy would make economic sense, strengthen communities and protect the environment. Let us start joining the dots.

How can we build a great country if we do not treat our people with respect? Troubled young Scots need to be understood and treated as human beings, not as problems to be tagged, dispersed or further alienated from society at the earliest opportunity.

We have an aging population and the many pensioners who are living in poverty need more than an opportunity to pay their council tax bills by direct debit, and our schools should be places for learning, not factories for good little consumer units.

The people of Scotland have the right to go about their business without Big Brother breathing down their neck, yet the Executive seems content to sit back while civil liberties are eroded. Greens will do everything in our power to ensure that our hard-won civil liberties are maintained and strengthened.

What of the economic future? Our economy is floating on the twin horrors of peak oil prices and debt, which is not a happy combination. When the oil starts to run out and the prices go through the roof, the debt will strangle us. The curious thing is that that is not a secret; it is an issue that has received increasing media coverage in recent months. However, the reaction of politicians has been one of staggering complacency. Scotland continues headlong down a path of almost unique economic unsustainability. None of the older parties offers the chance to drop the obsession with burning Scotland's oil, in spite of the dire consequences.

Greens would strive to reconnect with and strengthen local economies. Localisation, not globalisation, is the only way to build a truly stable economy. We would give communities the right to determine their own economic future. Big businesses would have to compete on a genuinely level playing field and within a planning system that puts people before profit.

We must ensure that we live within environmental limits. Although we have finally acknowledged the reality of climate change, our reaction remains wholly inadequate. Nero fiddled while Rome burned and we build motorways and encourage air travel while our planet fries. We know that we need to make immediate and dramatic cuts in greenhouse gas emissions but—again—complacency is the order of the day.

Early reductions in carbon emissions that resulted from the dismantling of our manufacturing industry have been followed by lacklustre achievements and stalled progress. Since the First Minister came to office, carbon emissions have remained static, while emissions from energy supply and transport are on the way up. Greens give climate change the attention that it requires, because it is a massive threat to every one of us, to our entire economy and to every corner of the globe. We would take steps to ensure that we do not waste energy in the home, in business and in transport. We would put in place a public transport system that is fit for the future, not one that belongs to the past. We would make Scotland the world leader in renewables, rather than a country that is always playing catch-up and seeing its innovations going overseas.

We are all answerable to today's electorate. No one should be surprised that short-term party policies shape our world, but we need to have the vision and courage to look beyond the confines of the next election. We might be here for multiples of four years, but the issues that we need to address to build a sustainable Scotland do not often fit into such neat timescales.

To build for Scotland a future that is fit for purpose is our challenge. It starts here and now. If we choose to, we can build a Scotland that is the most sustainable wee country in the world. Members should embrace the future and support the amendment in my name.

I move amendment S2M-4746.3, to leave out from "welcomes" to end and insert:

"acknowledges that ensuring a sustainable future for Scotland is the central responsibility of government and that none of the elements of sustainability: social justice, economic progress and environmental protection, can be viewed in isolation; rejects the concept that sustainable development simply means business as usual with a symbolic 'green thread' running through it; accepts that the development of a truly sustainable Scotland requires a fundamental reassessment of our current needs within the context of increasingly pressing environmental limits and a recognition that the current inequalities of wealth and power within Scotland must be challenged; notes that our current economy, based as it is on the profligate consumption of fossil fuels and other finite resources, can never be described as sustainable and that a just transition to a low-carbon economy is imperative for social, environmental and economic reasons; believes that Scotland is well placed to make such a transition and to develop a society characterised by social justice, respect for environmental limits and an economy fit for the long-term future, and calls on MSPs from all parties to act now for all our futures instead of for short-term political gain."

14:49

Euan Robson (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD): The future of Scotland lies in its people. The business of this Parliament is, and will continue to be, the securing of the progress of their interests.

That is what Liberal Democrats in government have sought to do in the past seven years, and it is what we will strive to do for the rest of this Parliament and whenever we are in government in the next Parliament and beyond.

Scotland's future depends on nurturing our children, on education throughout life for all, on health promotion and improvement, on treatment and care from cradle to grave, on the safety and security of all citizens and on their economic well-being in a clean, stable and sustainable environment. Our focus has been on delivering those objectives. We have focused not on distractions such as separatism, but on what matters to Scots—their hopes, aspirations and freedoms.

Thanks to the partnership Executive, in education, a free nursery place is now available to all three and four-year-olds, and there has been huge take-up. In 2005-06, a primary class pupil to teacher ratio of 17 was achieved, which compares with the United Kingdom average of more than 21. Recruitment of teachers is rising towards the target of 53,000 by 2007. The investment plans in school buildings and facilities are changing the learning environment for Scotland's children and young people. A new act is in place to provide additional support for children with learning needs, and attainment is rising.

Of course, there remains a major education agenda. For example, we need to make progress on having a less formal first year in primary schools. The curriculum review that was designed to broaden opportunity and choice presents challenges in its implementation. Children and young people need to be better supported at transitions between stages of learning and there are still too many low attainers, among whom those in care stand out as achieving negligible educational qualifications. As the First Minister said, education is, indeed, the catalyst to economic success.

On children and young people in care, our partnership Executive has invested in foster care and has recognised the contribution that foster carers make to society. The Adoption and Children (Scotland) Bill, which we will debate next week, will modernise adoption law and create a new permanence order that will give greater stability to children who are living in care for the long term. The challenge is further to enhance fostering, to cement in place the adoption reforms in the months ahead and to ensure that parenting skills are improved where that is required in order to ensure the best possible start in life in safe and secure homes for all the nation's children.

This Liberal Democrat and Labour Executive's achievements in health and community care include the introduction of free personal care for

the elderly and the ban on smoking in enclosed public spaces. The delayed discharge action plan of March 2002 has resulted in a 73 per cent reduction since then in the number of patients who are delayed for more than six weeks. There has been a 14 per cent increase in national health service staff since 1999, which includes 12 per cent more qualified nurses and 23 per cent more allied health professionals.

There has been a massive £297 million investment programme to restore dentistry across the country, which was badly neglected in pre-devolution days. There have been reductions in waiting times and there is the planned introduction of free eye and dental checks. Again, the agenda is to build upon the undoubted progress that has been made. We aim, for example, to extend healthy eating habits beyond the hungry for success programme; to develop the health improvement and promotion agenda; to enhance exercise and recreation opportunities in order to tackle obesity, especially among children; to take action to curb alcohol abuse and to further improve drug and alcohol rehabilitation services and see through more local provision of health care.

Shona Robison: On dentistry, will Euan Robson take the opportunity to apologise to the SNP, given that he and his Labour colleagues have now adopted the SNP policy of providing bursaries for dental students, which the First Minister said was ridiculous when we suggested it?

Euan Robson: I have no intention of apologising to the SNP for anything; the SNP should be apologising to Parliament for devoting most of its time to separatism and not to the issues that are before the Scottish people.

Liberal Democrats believe that not only is alcohol abuse a threat to individuals' health and a prime cause of crime, but it is a threat to the economic well-being of Scotland. With an anticipated reduction in the number of economically active people in Scotland in the years ahead because of demographic trends, we must not allow the growth of self-inflicted ill health among many of those who will create wealth and deliver services in the next 20 to 30 years.

The Executive and Parliament have addressed people in need through legislation such as the Adults with Incapacity (Scotland) Act 2000 and the Mental Health (Care and Treatment) (Scotland) Act 2003. Forthcoming legislation will improve adult protection and will take forward the recommendations of the Bichard report for our children.

Where there is need, there are now social workers in increased numbers—up 24 per cent

since 2001. The fast-track scheme for training will produce about 400 new social workers by 2008. They will enter a profession that has been revived and renewed by the Executive's strategic review and action plan for 2005 to 2010.

Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind): Does Euan Robson agree that there is something of a paradox in claiming as a strategic objective a greater number of social workers, whose function is presumably to clear up the mess that is made by social policies?

Euan Robson: I will allow the member to ponder the fact that there is a non sequitur in that.

Addressing need has led the Executive to develop the central heating programme for older people in order to begin to eliminate the phenomenon of excess winter deaths, which is unknown in colder Scandinavian countries. It has also concentrated minds on the task of eliminating homelessness by 2012. Neither task should be underestimated. The central heating programme will need to be flexible to meet new and differing needs and to emphasise more energy efficiency in the home, especially if fuel costs are to increase or remain high. Getting the right supply of homes in the right places by 2012 will require significant investment, but the advent of the new development plan process in the Planning etc (Scotland) Bill should lead to a faster and more responsive approval system when that bill is enacted.

Part of our economic progress depends on a better transport system. Key road and rail schemes are in place or are at various stages of delivery. From the Skye bridge, island air services, the Larkhall to Milngavie railway and the A1 through East Lothian and the Borders, improvements are becoming more apparent, and future schemes will reinforce that impression. In terms of sustainability, the impressive part of the Liberal Democrat-Labour Executive's achievement is the rise in the use of public transport. To take one figure, rail passenger journeys originating in Scotland rose to 72.9 million in 2004-05, which is the highest level for 40 years. The welcome concessionary fare schemes will increase that trend. The next stage in that process will need to be a national concessionary scheme for young people.

Sustainable transport is part of the wider strategy that the Executive has adopted for the environment. The national waste plan target of 25 per cent of municipal waste to be recycled by the end of this year has almost been achieved. We need to move on and reach the higher levels that have been attained in other European countries.

Ross Finnie led the debate in June on climate change. "Changing Our Ways: Scotland's Climate

Change Programme" quantifies Scotland's contribution to a reduction in carbon emissions, and includes a target of reducing carbon by an additional 1 million tonnes by 2010. The level of electricity generation from renewable sources is nearer the European Union average, and is above that of the UK. By developing sources other than wind power, the further and needed step change is possible. My colleague, Nora Radcliffe, will expand on that later in the debate, and will cover higher education, economic and justice issues.

The Steel commission report is one of the most significant documents to have been published post devolution. It sets the agenda for redefining and modernising the relationship between Scotland and the rest of the UK through a new federal settlement for Scotland, which would deliver new powers for the Scottish Parliament. On finance, the report proceeds on the principle that the Scottish Government should raise as much of its own spending as is practical.

I said at the outset that Scotland's future lies in its people. For all the achievements of the years since 1999, we face huge pressures ahead as a result of globalisation and demographic trends. Rightly, the Executive has adopted the fresh talent initiative, as the First Minister mentioned, which is invigorating our national life with the skills, commitment and industry of new Scots. We also have talent here already: the hidden talent that lies in the 20 per cent of lowest achievers in school; the hidden talent that lies in our children and young people in care; the hidden talent that is wasted by young offenders who need a reformed children's hearings system to interrupt behaviour patterns and to turn individuals to the path of full and useful citizenship; the hidden talent that is obscured by seeing a person's disability ahead of their capability; the hidden talent that is so often caused by inadequate housing, poor health or a combination of the two; the hidden talent of young people who are not in employment, education or training; and the hidden talent of people who are in the wrong jobs because retraining is too often too remote or too difficult to access practically.

I also said at the start of my remarks that Liberal Democrats believe in freedom: freedom from want, freedom from ignorance, freedom from lack of opportunity and freedom from fear and despair. This is what guides us in developing and implementing policies in government, and it will continue to do so in the Scotland of the future. I support the motion.

15:00

Bristow Muldoon (Livingston) (Lab): Today's debate is highly important because it sets the agenda for the remainder of the parliamentary session. It is a debate on the vision of the future of

Scotland that each party will put to the people of Scotland next May. Many people would agree that next year's election will be pivotal in Scotland's future. It will influence which of two central competing futures the people of Scotland choose to support.

Before turning to that choice, I want to say that Shiona Baird raised important points about environmental policy, which is central to Labour's agenda for Scotland's future. It is not irrelevant to discuss independence in that context because Scotland cannot solve the problems of climate change on its own. It is only through working in partnership with other countries that we can solve those problems, and the strength of our partnership within the United Kingdom gives Scotland a far stronger voice in the world with which to tackle climate change than isolationism would give us.

Labour will be contrasting our vision of a confident, successful Scotland with the main alternative put forward by the Scottish National Party, which is that of severing our links with our friends and neighbours in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

I will concentrate on economic issues. Other colleagues will touch on other aspects of Scotland's future, but a strong economy is central to our aspiration of improving the lives of all our citizens in all our communities. It is an area in which Labour has had considerable achievements through our actions at Westminster and here in the Scottish Parliament. We have benefited from a strong economic framework, which has seen low and stable interest rates and inflation combined with high levels of employment and low levels of unemployment.

Currently, Scotland's unemployment rate is around 5.5 per cent, which is about half what it was when the Tories were ejected from power. It is equal to the UK average and well below the European Union average of more than 8 per cent. In West Lothian—the area that I represent—where we suffered more than most from the global problems facing the electronics industry, unemployment is now below the Scottish and UK average, and the start-up rate for new businesses is among the highest in the country. That is due to the underlying strength of the economy.

That has come about not by accident, but because Governments both in Westminster and here in Holyrood have been committed to creating the climate for the economy to grow along with investing in the country's infrastructure and providing support to people to get back into the workplace. In Scotland, we have supported business in a number of ways, including backing for the commercialisation of ideas from our universities and greater support for Scottish

companies overseas. There has also been a greater focus on key growth industries, including—but not exclusively—financial services, life sciences, energy and tourism. We have encouraged people with skills and talent to migrate to Scotland to help to fill skills gaps. As a result, the population of Scotland is growing for the third year running, contrary to all the predictions of doom and gloom from Jim Mather, among others.

In education, skills and learning, we have invested heavily in all sectors, from nursery education through to Scotland's colleges and universities. We have met our target for modern apprenticeships two years ahead of schedule. In our universities, we have a number of internationally renowned departments, including the life sciences departments at the University of Dundee and the University of Glasgow.

In transport, we have completed key missing sections of our motorway and trunk road network, including the M77, and we are committed to completing other key links, including the M74. We have opened 11 new railway stations, and a number of reopenings or completely new lines are at various stages of development, representing the biggest expansion of rail services in Scotland since before Beeching. We are using the new powers that the Scottish Parliament has acquired from Westminster to drive forward that railway infrastructure programme.

Incidentally, I noted in yesterday's *Edinburgh Evening News* that the SNP's absentee leader, Alex Salmond, was claiming plans to improve capacity on the Forth rail bridge as his own initiative, undoubtedly in the full knowledge that such plans have already been prepared by Network Rail, the infrastructure company established by Labour to save the railways from the Tory disaster that was Railtrack. He is a recycled leader, recycling others' ideas and passing them off as his own.

Scotland has also been improving its connectivity to the world through both telecommunications and the establishment of 32 new direct air links.

Looking to the future, Labour still has a strong vision of the Scotland that we want to help to shape. We recognise that we live in a fast changing world, with increased globalisation of the economy, climate change, demographic changes and dramatic advances in science and technology. We need to ensure that Scotland is positioned to deal with those challenges. That is why I think that the First Minister is right to put further enhancement of our education system at the heart of our vision for the future. If we are to compete, our young people and all our population need to be equipped not only with the essential building blocks of a good education in English and

mathematics, but with the scientific and engineering knowledge that will enable Scotland to remain a player in the development of new technologies and with knowledge of languages to allow Scots and Scots businesses to engage with emerging markets.

We will continue to invest in our economy's infrastructure and, in the next session, Labour will make it a priority to tackle the remaining 16 to 19-year-olds who are not in employment, education or training. Labour will work hard to deliver our historic goal of full employment.

The alternative vision that the nationalists offer for the next few years focuses not on preparing Scotland for challenges, but on an introspective debate about divorcing Scotland from one of the most successful political, social and economic partnerships in history. If the nationalists were in a position to form part of a Government, their overriding priority would be to break up Britain. The terms of the divorce settlement from the UK and the currency that a separate Scotland would use would be uncertain. I presume that the currency would initially be sterling and that interest rates would still be set by the Bank of England. If a euro referendum were won, interest rates would instead be set in Frankfurt, but if a euro referendum were lost, what would the nationalists do? Would they continue to be hitched to sterling or would they establish a new currency? What would business think of all that?

There is political uncertainty about the sort of Scotland that the nationalists want. Jim Mather wants to position the SNP as a right-of-centre party on traditional Tory territory, whereas Nicola Sturgeon said only this week that she sees the SNP as the natural home for disillusioned Scottish Socialist Party supporters.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): You should finish now, Mr Muldoon.

Bristow Muldoon: The SNP needs to be honest with the people of Scotland about its political direction; it cannot face both ways at once.

Ms Maureen Watt (North East Scotland) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Bristow Muldoon: The Presiding Officer has asked me to conclude, so I will.

At a time of increased globalisation, Scotland's influence in the world is best served by continuing our partnerships through the UK, the United Nations Security Council, the G8, NATO and major players in the EU. In the debate in the months ahead, I believe that the people of Scotland will prefer Labour's vision of the future, which is based on achievement, aspiration and a solid economic foundation. They will reject the gamble on the tired nationalist isolationist model.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Muldoon, you really should be finished.

Bristow Muldoon: They will send proud Alex homewards to think again about his racing tips.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I want to call a considerable number of back benchers, so I will keep members strictly to time.

15:07

Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP): If Bristow Muldoon had kept to his time, he would have saved us a minute and a half of waiting for the worst joke that he could ever have conjured up, which bombed as he delivered it. Perhaps he could save us such time in the future.

I agree with Bristow Muldoon that all members of the Scottish Parliament are here because we share a deep interest in Scotland's future. The debate provides an opportunity for us to set out our competing views on how that future is created. I agree with him that one issue with which we are wrestling is how to make our country as prosperous and fair as it can be. If we address that question, we begin to chew over some of the important issues in our competing visions. I want to make Scotland as prosperous as it can be and to deliver as much fairness as I can, and I have concluded in my political life that that will be best delivered through independence. I will explain why in my speech.

I will also tackle some examples from the glorious record that I am sure we will hear about in the nine months of the run-up to the election and which has been so absolutely fabulous that the Executive merits a return to office. In examining that record, I found a helpful page on Scottish Labour's website, which I suspect was created by Bristow Muldoon and which shows why the claims are fatuous and false.

The first claim that I will explore is:

"The Scottish economy has grown in every quarter over the past three years, and growth since 2003 has been around or above our long term trend rate."

The problem with that bold statement is that it is factually untrue. The Scottish economy has not grown in every quarter in the past three years. In the first quarters of 2003 and 2005, no growth occurred. The election is still nine months away but Bristow Muldoon and the Labour Party are misleading the people. Since 1999, there have been two quarters of negative growth, and the average growth rate in Scotland has been 1.9 per cent, compared with an average growth rate of 2.7 per cent for the UK. Scotland's growth rate may be at or around our trend growth rate, but that trend growth rate is appalling. That is the issue that we must confront and that is the reason why the

Parliament needs the power to vary taxation and reduce business taxation and therefore put Scotland at a truly competitive advantage, which will allow us to prosper.

Mr Kerr: I have a question that Nicola Sturgeon did not address. In the light of the Scottish National Party's spending commitments, which are rolled out daily, how will the SNP create a right-wing taxation environment and a left-wing environment for students and the elderly that involves a local income tax? That simply cannot be done.

Mr Swinney: We must balance the books. I have an obligation to balance the books in the SNP, and our manifesto will set out how we intend to change public spending in order to address social issues and put the economy at a competitive advantage.

There is only so much that we can do under devolution. The other day, we set out our proposals on rates for small businesses and said how we will use devolved powers to try to put Scottish business at a competitive advantage. However, we must realise that Scotland is no longer operating in some great competitive regime in the United Kingdom. Members should consider the criticisms that the new director general of the CBI has made about the United Kingdom's uncompetitiveness as a destination for business. As I said, we must put Scotland at a competitive advantage.

The second claim on Bristow Muldoon's website that I want to deal with is that

"GDP growth in Scotland has been strong relative to our international competitors."

Our growth rate has been 1.9 per cent. Ireland's growth rate is expected to be 5 per cent this year—it was 4.6 per cent last year. In 2005, Luxembourg's growth rate was 4 per cent; Denmark's was 3.2 per cent; Finland's was 2.9 per cent; Sweden's was 2.7 per cent; and Norway's was 2.3 per cent. On average, small European countries are growing by 3.2 per cent. Our growth rate cannot match that.

Bristow Muldoon: Will the member take an intervention?

Mr Swinney: I should, as I have mentioned Mr Muldoon in my speech.

Bristow Muldoon: Will Mr Swinney tell us for how many decades the Irish economy lagged behind the UK economy after Ireland achieved independence?

Mr Swinney: I point out to Mr Muldoon that the Scottish economy's trend growth rate has been 1.9 per cent or thereabouts for the past 30 years. If he is trying to tell me that that is a glorious

performance for which we should all be thankful, I am proud to be a member of a party that has higher ambitions for Scotland than he and his colleagues have.

I have mentioned business rates, and want to move on to the second question that I want to address—the question of fairness. Since the Parliament was established, Labour has stood resolutely in favour of the council tax, and has presided over a situation in which the lowest-paid fifth of our population, who used to pay 3.3 per cent of their income in council tax, are now paying 4.8 per cent of their income in council tax. The council tax system is undeniably unfair, and we want to replace it with a local income tax system that is based on people's ability to pay. We want a cheaper and more efficient system for collecting money that reflects the needs of individuals and vulnerable people in our society, and we will set out the balance that we want to achieve in our manifesto commitments in the period ahead.

The people of Scotland want their Government and parliamentarians to achieve more than the current Administration has achieved. They want a Government that will deliver a more competitive economy, public services that meet their needs and fair taxes. They want a Government that will speak clearly and with dignity on their behalf in the international community. They want a Government that has the powers that are required to transform the lives of every citizen. It is up to us to deliver the vision that will allow us to achieve those objectives. I profoundly believe that giving our Parliament the ability to put our country at an advantage and to tackle injustice in our society is the way by which ambition in Scotland will be raised, and we will put that proposal to the people in May next year.

15:14

Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind): The motion's clear implication is that the most secure future and the greatest prosperity to which the nation can reasonably aspire will be delivered by continuing with the current method by which we manage our resources, maintain our national social objectives and execute our foreign relationships. That would be laudable if, as a result of our current system of governing and safeguarding Scotland's interests, our fellow citizens enjoyed excellent health, our young people could fulfil their ambitions without having to leave Scotland and our poorer old people were free of the fear of eating or heating beyond the means that the state provides for them. There would be a rationale to wanting more of the same in the future if our present arrangements had not given rise to Carol Craig's brave attempt to help Scots to raise their expectations and develop the

confidence to pursue higher aspirations in personal achievement, community development and a national sense of well-being.

If we did not have the pessimism and poverty that were revealed in official statistics that were published today, or malnourished children, or teenagers who are so unfit that they are judged not strong enough to join the armed services until they have undergone intensive training courses to reach an acceptable level of fitness, we might consider it sensible to continue with this system of governance. If we were not angry and frustrated at our own impotence as a national community to prevent our fellow citizens from becoming embroiled in wars that we do not support, and if we were able to develop relationships with other countries that enjoyed support in Scotland, that might constitute a reason for continuing with a political union that was forged to meet the needs of both Scotland and England in the 17th and 18th centuries.

At its inception, the union was probably a good deal for both countries. England's back door was shut as regards her security, defence and foreign policies and, following the disaster of the Darien scheme, Scots gained access to England's empire, with economic and career development for ambitious Scots at home and abroad. However, although the great political, social and industrial movements of the 20th century brought prosperity to some, they also centralised out of Scotland the machinery of public policy making and, therefore, the intrinsic sense of Scotland's national responsibility for the well-being of Scots. Scottish entrepreneurialism was denuded as ambitious risk-takers and innovators followed the headquarters and research and development departments of private sector companies—often, companies that were previously based in Scotland.

Figures for emigration from Scotland during the 20th century describe better than I can, due to the shortness of time, the imbalance in economic development and personal fulfilment that grew between the populations of Scotland and England. Scots excused themselves and rationalised the lack of opportunity in Scotland by persuading themselves that Scotland was too poor or too small, that it had too much marginal, unproductive land or that it was better off being run from London because we lacked people of ability. As was the case among a surprisingly high percentage of those who were elected by Scots to represent them at Westminster—whom I met when I was there—there was a commonly held belief that we Scots benefited from the civilising, liberal influence of the English establishment.

That last point is probably one of the most urgent reasons for Scotland to place firmly in the

past those facts and the arguments that have raged over their interpretation. The facts of life in today's and tomorrow's world dictate that we take full responsibility for our own future rather than leave our fate to a pragmatic arrangement that suited our interests 300 years ago. Contemporary and future self-interest and pragmatism demand that we take action to cope with the widening social and demographic differences that exist between England and ourselves. Our needs regarding population growth are diametrically opposed; however, without sovereignty invested in the Scottish Parliament, we will be subject to whatever suits England's needs. The potential to develop in Scotland a less racially divided and more immigrant-friendly society than is currently developing in England will be lost, and that will be a huge loss not only to people in Scotland but to humanity in general.

The old argument that we have benefited from being on England's economic and trading coat tails no longer applies. The Executive parties have, effectively, conceded that in their laudable attempts to establish direct communication and trading relationships with China, America, Europe and Australia. If proof is needed that a small country can turn around its economy and society although it was on the northern periphery of Europe, had an aging population and a high level of emigration among young people, and although its exports and economy were tied to a bigger neighbour, we should look at Ireland and think back about 20 years ago when one of the arguments that was advanced against Scottish independence was the fact that we did not want to be like Ireland. Times have changed, and it is time that we did.

We can have the best of both worlds. We can maintain social harmony and union among all the people in the British isles and, at the same time, accept the responsibility—sovereignty by any other name—for our own future.

15:20

Sarah Boyack (Edinburgh Central) (Lab): The motion and amendments before us, and the tenor of the debate so far, set out the clear choice for people in Scotland. Either we can recognise the progress that has been made in the first few years of our new Scottish Parliament or we can retreat into navel gazing and negativity. I believe that there is much worth welcoming in the past seven years of our work in the Scottish Parliament.

We need only look at the investment in key public services and the boost that has been given to our social and physical infrastructure. We have seen massive changes coming through in our health service and through our investment in education and transport. We should take pride in

the fact that about 94 per cent of our under-fives now have the chance to attend pre-school education. For years, we in the Labour Party campaigned for that provision and we have now delivered it. Pre-school education now looks like something that we have had for all time because we have made it a natural aspiration and expectation. We have been able to invest in those high-quality policies because we have had economic stability, which has enabled us to benefit from massive public investment and expenditure. It is crucial that we ensure that the investment continues.

I can see the transformation that has taken place in my Edinburgh Central constituency, which has benefited from investments in further and higher education that have produced highly skilled graduates and world-class research. Thousands upon thousands of new jobs have been created in the city. I can also see the benefits from the fresh talent initiative, which has built on the contributions that have been made by people who have come to Scotland and have added their talent to ours. That benefit can be seen in the labour market and in the new Polish shops that are popping up across the city.

However, there are challenges as well. We need to make choices about how we use our energies. We need to build capacity to work in partnership. It is not enough to think just about what the Scottish Parliament does; we need to ensure that we work in partnership with local authorities throughout Scotland, with the business community and with the voluntary sector. I disagree with the SNP's prescription for Scotland. At a time when the European Union is enlarging and when we have major global environmental challenges, we should not look inwards on ourselves and indulge in prolonged constitutional navel gazing. That would be a huge waste of our collective energies.

Surely it is far better to focus on the historic challenges that Scotland faces and on how we tackle our root inequalities. Even with the work of the past seven years, too many people still live in poverty and too many children do not have the opportunities that we need to create for them. We need to ensure that every Scot has the chance to be part of our prosperity. We will do that partly through investing in public services, but we also need job creation and tackling unemployment—issues that did not feature once in John Swinney's treatise on economic development. We need to focus on those practical issues and look at how we build a way out of poverty for people. We will do that through providing employment opportunities and by building their talents. Jack McConnell's speech is to be endorsed for focusing on the importance for Scotland's future of investing in skills and learning. That must be a priority for the next Parliament.

We also need to focus on our geographic and strategic advantages. One of the success stories of the work that Labour members—along with our Liberal Democrat colleagues—have done is the way in which we have built a renewables industry almost from scratch. We are turning Scotland into Europe's renewable energy powerhouse. We need to make the most of our distinctive constitutional settlement by focusing on those practical issues rather than letting ourselves be diverted into negative debates. The challenge is about how Scotland is to be equipped for the future.

The discussions that have taken place through the futures forum, in which I know many members are involved, have happened outwith the Parliament but they have taken place in the capital city, which is crucial to Scotland's economic future. We need sustained, long-term investment and we need to resist the cherry picking whereby Opposition parties are in favour of a project one week but are against it the next week. We need long-term commitment and sustained investment.

I want to raise two issues—to which I ask the Deputy First Minister to respond in his summing up—on which we need to do more work. First, we need to look at the relocation policy's strategic and cumulative impact on our capital city. The Executive response needs to consider the long-term impact of that policy. Secondly, we need to consider the impact of the huge lack of affordable housing in our capital city. In both those policy areas, the Executive can act, but in both it could jeopardise the success that we have delivered so far.

There is innovative futures thinking in Scotland, in this Parliament and outwith it. The city regions debates that we have been having in Edinburgh and the Lothians for the past two years need to be plugged into the economic future of the country. There must be consideration of the links between Glasgow and Edinburgh, our key cities, and of how they can work together, and we must examine the infrastructure between those two cities. We should look at our quality of life and welcome the fact that Glasgow and Edinburgh have topped the Condé Nast poll for UK cities. That is quite an achievement. It is not just about our economic future; it is also about our quality of life, and we ignore that at our peril.

We must ensure that we have sustained quality of life. That is partly about quality of life in our cities and partly about transforming our economies, but it is also about looking at people's real life experiences. Annabel Goldie's speech ignored the reality on the ground; it was a speech full of doom and gloom. We can see the positive impact that we have collectively made on our communities, with new jobs, new schools, new community facilities, and people in work whose

families have never had employment. Those are real achievements and they are the kind of things that we need to reflect on in the next nine months.

Let us ensure that our last few months in this parliamentary session are used properly. It is true that we must focus on the big picture, but let us also examine some of the issues that affect our constituents on a daily basis. Futures thinking is not just about big, high-level strategic thinking; it is also about thinking about people's quality of life. We must think about how we can tackle the tragedy of the drugs that destroy people's lives in our communities, but we must also consider our long-term licensing policies and how we can move forward on antisocial behaviour. Those issues must also be reflected in this chamber.

The motion from the Executive parties gives Scotland the chance for confidence and success, and I argue that we should all support it.

15:26

Mrs Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con): One of the main drivers for devolution in Scotland was the dissatisfaction with remote government felt by many people. They felt that Westminster did not understand the needs of Scotland and that, if only major issues of responsibility could be transferred to government within Scotland, many of our frustrations and disadvantages would be overcome. Where devolution so far has disappointed many people, particularly in the more peripheral parts of the country, is that Holyrood seems as remote as Westminster, with an Executive that controls our lives from Edinburgh and gives insufficient local freedom in the running of key public services.

Nowhere is that seen more clearly than in the health service, where the Minister for Health and Community Care holds a tight rein over health boards, which are obliged to respond to the many targets set by the Executive and, in turn, control the health professionals in their employment, thus limiting professional freedom and resulting in a growing resentment against a centrally directed bureaucracy that dictates the priorities that should instead be decided according to clinical need.

No one can deny that the Government has invested heavily in the national health service in Scotland, with spending doubled since 1997, and up 81 per cent since 1999 under the Scottish Executive. New contracts are in place for general practitioners and consultants, and other health professionals have seen major improvements in their pay structures, but it is still rare to find a doctor over the age of 55 working in the NHS, and nursing recruitment, although increasing, still goes largely towards replacing those leaving the

service, rather than expanding the workforce to meet the growing demands placed upon it.

Our NHS professionals, at whatever level, work very hard and do a great job. Many are highly skilled and operate technology that was undreamed of in my younger days in the service. Diagnostics have been revolutionised by magnetic resonance image scanning and by advances in biomedical science, and we remain at the forefront of medical research and its applications, with treatments available and under development for many conditions that were previously untreatable. However, people in Scotland still have to wait far too long to access the diagnostics and treatments that are available. Resources targeted at waiting list initiatives mean that, while targeted conditions are dealt with quickly, others have to wait, and doctors are frustrated by not being able to respond to the clinical needs of their patients.

I am sorry that the Minister for Health and Community Care has left the chamber. He does not like it when I quote anecdotal evidence, but if he spoke to some of the medical staff I hear from he would know that it is common practice for operating lists to be altered by management so that targets can be met, to the outrage of clinicians, who have made up their lists according to clinical need and are then faced with telling their patients that the operations that they are prepared for will have to be delayed. If the minister mixed in the medical circles where I move, the commonest thing that he would hear would be the question, "Why on earth can't Government just drop all these targets and let us get on with our jobs?"

That resentment about the loss of professional freedom, which is driven by concern that patient care is being compromised because of politically set targets, has been bubbling away under the surface for a considerable time. It came as no surprise to me that the British Medical Association called on the Executive to scrap its hospital waiting times targets. Not only the BMA, but the Royal College of Nursing and patient groups now say that targeting is damaging patient care. As Jane McCready of the RCN told *Scotland on Sunday* this week:

"Frontline nursing staff tell us that they believe there is currently too much focus on hospital waiting times. We recognise that the time a patient has to wait is important. But we believe that greater emphasis must be placed on the overall quality of patient experience."

Margaret Davidson, chief executive of the Scotland Patients Association, said:

"Patients should be treated according to clinical priority rather than just according to waiting-time guarantees."

The Deputy First Minister and Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Nicol Stephen): Is Conservative party policy now to be

that all waiting time targets in Scotland's NHS will be scrapped?

Mrs Milne: We have stated clearly that our intention is to abolish targets.

I am a passionate believer in our NHS and feel strongly that patients should be able to access appropriate care where and when they need it, but that has not been the case in Scotland in recent years. I was therefore pleased when the Minister for Health and Community Care finally agreed to expand capacity by allowing the NHS to use facilities in the independent and voluntary sectors, although that could have been done many years ago if his predecessors in the post had followed the lead of the last Conservative Government. There was certainly no need to spend many millions of pounds of taxpayers' money to purchase the Golden Jubilee national hospital for the NHS before using it for NHS patients.

Until the minister loosens the reins and trusts the professionals to do the job that they have spent many years of their lives training for, there will be malaise within the service and difficulties in retaining a workforce that is increasingly demoralised and resentful. We have some wonderful talent at all levels in our health service; if only it could be set free from political control. I ask the minister to trust the professionals, release the political straitjacket that currently holds them back and look forward to the expanding, enthusiastic and committed Scottish health team that would follow. Devolution of responsibility right down to local level would encourage people to remain within the health service, would help to secure the benefits our older population offers and would contribute to a better quality of life and a healthier future for people in Scotland.

Annabel Goldie made it plain that when we announce the details of our health policy in due course we will endeavour to restore control to clinicians and patients and minimise the hand of Government and bureaucracy. I am delighted to support the amendment in Annabel Goldie's name.

15:33

Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD): I will comment on Nanette Milne's remarks. Doctors are trained to practise medicine, not necessarily to manage resources. We just have to look at the pharmaceutical bill to see that things can sometimes go wrong.

The future for Scotland lies in our people building on Scotland's successes; rising to the challenges that remain and moving forward; increasing entrepreneurial activity; closing the health gap; finding ways to link into growing economies such as China and India by, for

example, sharing expertise in sustainable energy solutions, which would benefit them and us; focusing on developing sectors such as energy and biotechnology; improving Scotland's productivity; and leading the way on environmental sustainability, with the powers and fiscal levers to give the Scottish Parliament the tools to do the job.

That does not mean the disintegration of the United Kingdom. We do not need to extricate ourselves from all the links and interdependencies—commercial, financial, academic and personal—that have been built up over many years between Scotland and the rest of the UK.

Most people who live and work in Scotland do not believe that its future lies in independence; most people can see through the wilder claims for the benefits of going it alone. They are not persuaded by irresponsible and unaffordable policies that are advocated by the Opposition—indeed, any of the Opposition parties. People know that things have to be paid for and that if we splurge in one area we are likely to have to retrench in another.

The devolution settlement is not set in tablets of stone; it has developed since 1999 and it will continue to evolve. Much of this debate is about how we have succeeded as a country with devolved competency. We do not need a revolution to succeed.

I want to look at how we can succeed further. As my colleague Euan Robson indicated, energy is one of the areas in which we foresee a great future for Scotland. We must grasp the economic and environmental opportunity that renewable energy offers to Scotland and make that a priority. We will have a nuclear industry for many years to come through decommissioning, but new nuclear generation is not the answer to our energy needs here and now. It is prohibitively expensive and, apart from all the other contra-indications, it cannot be ready in time to replace old coal and old nuclear.

Bruce Crawford: Can Nora Radcliffe please confirm for us whether it is Liberal policy not to support the building of new nuclear power stations?

Nora Radcliffe: I think that that policy has been absolutely clear for years.

Bruce Crawford: No, it has not.

Nora Radcliffe: I have restated it; it is absolutely clear. We have passed resolutions about it at conference after conference. We do not believe that we should move to new nuclear power stations.

The future and the opportunities are in clean coal, carbon sequestration and, most of all, a revolution in energy efficiency, developing renewable technologies and microgeneration. We will benefit directly and by sharing and exporting our growing expertise. It is something that we are already good at. An unusually high proportion of firms in Scotland are engaged in novel product innovation and Scotland's export sales per worker, which are significantly higher than the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development average, grew strongly between 1999 and 2003.

Coming from the north-east, I am very aware of the strength of our intellectual capacity in Scotland, much of which is centred in the north-east in our two excellent universities and in such world-class institutes as the Macaulay institute and the Rowett institute. Devolution has allowed us to invest in, protect and enhance that academic tradition. Our students do not pay tuition fees, they have access to maintenance grants, and we do not have top-up fees. Furthermore, we have invested heavily in the academic institutions as well as in the students, in the interests of the future of Scotland.

Devolution has allowed us to undertake major and long-awaited changes in the law of Scotland on mental health, land reform, the family and in many other areas, and to overhaul and improve our legal system.

Devolution and looking at issues in a Scottish context has been a good thing for rural Scotland. Rural issues and the rural dimension in mainstream issues are far more likely to be taken seriously here in Holyrood than they ever were in Westminster. This is still very much a work in progress, however, and an aspect of a future Scotland, but I want to build a great deal on the start that has been made.

The future of Scotland will largely be built on what we have achieved in the few short years since devolution. In the hands of those who are determined to make devolution work, our achievements are not inconsiderable and our future as Scots, Britons, Europeans and citizens of the world has the potential to be very bright indeed.

15:38

Shona Robison (Dundee East) (SNP): Mr McConnell is very fond of praising the Centre for Confidence and Well-being, something that Margo MacDonald referred to earlier. However, there is the hypocrisy of his—and of his Labour back-bench colleagues in particular—using the first plenary debate of the new parliamentary term to talk down the ability and prospects of their fellow

Scots to manage their own affairs. Can they not see the contradiction in that? They talk down the confidence of their people and their ability to run their own affairs, but praise the Centre for Confidence and Well-being for trying to do the opposite. What a ridiculous situation to have in Scotland.

My daughter gets the fairytale about Henny Penny and the sky falling in, but she is three years old and is at nursery. It is patronising in the extreme that Labour, when talking to adult Scots, is trying to use the same fairytale in relation to independence. It shows how desperate Labour has become. If any Labour politician had been brave enough to knock on a few doors over the summer, they would have realised that such scaremongering has a diminishing return, even among their own supporters—a growing number of whom now support independence.

We can all agree that good health is the key to happiness, success and self-esteem. Few would differ from that opinion. Time and again, the people of Scotland place good health, through the provision of health services, at the top of their agenda. However, the Registrar General for Scotland yesterday published figures that showed life expectancy in Scotland to be 74.2 years for males and 79.2 years for females. Although life expectancy has shown an increase, huge disparities exist in Scotland, especially in the west. We remain obstinately behind all our European neighbours. We pay dearly for that—and not only in terms of lives blighted by poor health or lives cut short unnecessarily. Nicholas Crafts of the London School of Economics has written that, if Scotland were to achieve even the mortality rates of our English counterparts, the gain to our economy would be in the region of £2,900 per person, or 21 per cent of gross domestic product. That is an astonishing figure. Simply by living longer and enjoying better health, and by matching the life expectancy of people in England—which is far from exceptional by European standards—we could make our nation a fifth better off than it is at present. The prize of a healthier nation—whether cast in social terms or in crude economic terms—is one worth seeking. The question is how we can get there.

Mr Kerr: Does the member endorse the view of the World Health Organisation, which is that Scotland is an exemplar nation in its policies on health improvement?

Shona Robison: Without a doubt, there are some things that we agree on. For example, we supported the ban on smoking in public places, which was initiated by my SNP colleague, Stewart Maxwell. *[Interruption.]* If the Minister for Health and Community Care will listen for a moment, I will point out that we do not believe in opposition for

opposition's sake. When we agree, we will say that we agree. There are some good public health policies that we have agreed with. However, improvement is needed in many areas.

The question is whether this Parliament can deal better with the underlying causes of ill health. The underlying causes are poverty and deprivation, and no one would argue that they are easy to fix. They cannot be fixed overnight. However, to begin to fix them we have to have powers at our disposal.

The First Minister made a passing reference to challenges that still exist in tackling child poverty. What an underestimate. We have a shameful record of child poverty in Scotland. For an energy-rich nation to have any children still living in poverty is a disgrace. We on this side of the chamber want to fix the deep-rooted problems—but we can do so only if we have the powers of a normal independent Parliament. To pretend otherwise to the people of Scotland is to deceive them.

When it comes to the big ideas on health, we are prepared to take Labour on. The Minister for Health and Community Care brags of record levels of investment in health. Yes, there have been record levels of investment, but what we need is better delivery. What we have are hidden waiting lists—which the minister continues to support—and hospitals that are lumbered with credit-card scale repayments because of ill-considered private finance initiative projects. In the minister's own area in Lanarkshire we have seen the debacle of accident and emergency services that are driven by PFI considerations. The minister knows that that is the case. Short termism and the ill-founded policies of the minister's Government are lumbering future generations.

Scotland desperately needs and deserves a Government that will put the health of the nation at the heart of everything that it does—a Government that is prepared to tackle not only the effects but the causes of child poverty. The SNP will do just that. We are the only party with the big idea to move Scotland forward to independence, to ensure that this Parliament has the powers to deliver for the people of Scotland.

15:45

Mr Alasdair Morrison (Western Isles) (Lab): We reconvene in an important week for the residents of the Western Isles—a week in which two new air links have been announced. The first is a direct link between Benbecula and Inverness and I can reveal exclusively—after having told the listeners of BBC Radio nan Gaidheal, of course—that the second is that Eastern Airways plans to run two flights between Stornoway and Aberdeen

on every weekday. Those are hugely important developments, but it is not only the air links that will be improved—following yesterday's highly encouraging statement by the Minister for Transport, a new ferry route between Lochboisdale on South Uist and Mallaig took another significant step in the right direction.

I mention those developments because they chime perfectly with many of the themes that the First Minister outlined earlier this afternoon. Improving communication links is vital for Scottish islanders if we are to realise our potential and our ambitions. This week major improvements continue to be implemented. Although some members—such as Shona Robison—continue to obsess about the constitutional arrangements in the United Kingdom, many of us, along with the vast majority of Scots, are content with a settlement that allows us to focus on the people's needs.

Unemployment rates in the Western Isles are at an historic low and there are record levels of investment. A package of £52 million is being spent on rebuilding existing schools and building new schools in the Western Isles and £80 million is being spent on improving water quality by upgrading and replacing Victorian water and sewerage systems. I could go on to talk about housing and community initiatives.

For obvious reasons, I always maintain that the Parliament's finest hour was the day that we passed the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003, when we translated an age-old aspiration to the statute book. Since the days of Keir Hardie, many a Highland socialist has fought for and dreamed of the day when legislators would pass an act of Parliament that would give communities the legislative tools to dismantle the iniquitous system of land ownership that blighted lives and held back communities for many years. It must be noted that the same people who opposed land reform opposed the national minimum wage and other necessary reforms. Contrary to what those people said would happen, community ownership of land is allowing entrepreneurship to flourish. Businesses are being created, homes built and communities regenerated.

For generations, the influence and talents of the members of the Highland diaspora have been evident in many distant lands. Our generation of politicians has an opportunity to help to turn that tide. The partnership Government in Scotland and the Labour Government at Westminster recognise that healthy island communities are an important component of Great Britain. For the first time in 30 years, there have been two successive increases in the population of the Western Isles. Thankfully, the economically active are returning and it is our duty to ensure that we continue to support the

appropriate policies that allow that encouraging trend to continue.

It is right to expect Government to intervene, but people in the Western Isles have a remarkable opportunity to help to shape and improve our own lot. That is why we must remain focused on our responsibilities in relation to climate change and make positive progress on the generation of renewable energy. We now have a great opportunity to harvest the wind and the huge tidal resources around our shores—elements that for centuries have shaped the contours of our islands.

For the first time in our existence, the Western Isles has a competitive advantage—we have a product that is in great demand. We need the tools to harness and harvest those resources to ensure that we augment the millions of pounds that the Scottish Executive and the UK Government have spent, and will—rightly—continue to spend, in our islands. We find ourselves well placed for the renewable energy revolution. A market with a voracious appetite exists and we can help to feed it. We must work collectively to ensure that we take advantage of those favourable conditions. I am delighted that both enterprise ministers are in the chamber because they fully appreciate the potential that exists to generate electricity and to provide manufacturing in the Western Isles.

It is vital that we establish an interconnector between the Western Isles and mainland Scotland, but as councillors in the Western Isles have so ably demonstrated over the past two weeks, the nationalists are divided even on that important issue. In this forum, the SNP claims that Scotland can and should be the green powerhouse of Europe and yet, as the Western Isles councillors exposed, it continually undermines the efforts of those who pursue legitimate economic and environmental goals. Again, we see rank hypocrisy from the ranks of the Scottish National Party.

In common with the rest of Scotland, my constituency has seen massive investment in roads and infrastructure, including in schools and community facilities. Thankfully, we are also seeing ever-improving standards in our health service, as I am sure the Minister for Health and Community Care will learn when he visits Stornoway on Monday.

Those improvements did not happen by accident. They were all implemented because the Executive is rightly focused on the people's priorities and not on the nationalists' sterile and never-ending constitutional wrangling. Of course, such wrangling would be the dominant feature if there was ever a coalition in this place between the Trotskyites, the Scottish nationalists and the tree-hugging wing of nationalism, the Greens.

15:51

Colin Fox (Lothians) (SSP): Well, what a summer that was. I hope that everyone did something nice over the summer and had a pleasant time. It is a summer that I will not forget in a hurry. I had some interesting times and some challenging times and, gor blimey, just to sign it all off, I nearly bumped into Tony Blair the other day.

I was in Gracemount leisure centre on Saturday morning with my six year-old, who I take there for a swimming lesson. Members will imagine my surprise when I heard that both the First Minister and the Prime Minister were due there later that afternoon. I got away in the nick of time. Given today's announcements, I am sure that we are all wondering what Jack McConnell and Tony Blair talked about at Gracemount leisure centre last Saturday afternoon. I am sure that the conversation went along the lines of the First Minister pleading with the Prime Minister to go: "Gonnae go, Tony. Gonnae go before next May. Gonnae. Don't stay any longer. You are hated here. We'll all get lynched." Much to everyone's surprise, we have to give the First Minister big respect, as Ali G would say. In the papers today, we saw the announcement that Tony Blair is indeed to go. It is now a certainty that he will go before May 2007.

In this debate, I suppose that it is apt that we discuss what Tony Blair be remembered for. Will he be remembered as the man who brought 20 years of Tory rule to an end?

Members: Yes.

Colin Fox: Will he be remembered as the first Labour leader who was re-elected with a big majority?

Members: Yes.

Colin Fox: Will he be remembered as the first Labour Prime Minister to win three consecutive victories?

Members: Yes.

Colin Fox: No, no and no. Labour members got the answers to those three questions wrong. Without any shadow of a doubt, Tony Blair will be remembered as a liar. He will be remembered as the Prime Minister who not only took us into an illegal war in Iraq but lied to us about its purposes. He will find his place in history alongside liars such as Richard Milhous Nixon and those other leaders who could not be trusted.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Fox, I ask you to be a bit more careful about the language that you use.

Margaret Jamieson (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab): It was Tony Blair and the Labour Party that established this place.

Colin Fox: That is right, Margaret. Of course, if Blair hangs on much longer—

Sarah Boyack: Will the member give way?

Colin Fox: I was about to mention Labour's albatross. Just let me finish this point, Sarah. I am glad that proceedings have become so animated since I got up to speak.

Of course, the worry for the First Minister is that if the Prime Minister hangs on, he will become an albatross around Labour's neck and Labour will get humptied at the Holyrood elections.

My key point in the debate is that we are being given the choice between the constitutional stability of devolution and independence just at a time when the prospect of the Tories winning a general election and the Cameron factor arising puts big question marks over the constitutional stability of any devolution settlement.

Sarah Boyack: Does the fact that the SSP has not yet been mentioned in its leader's speech mean that he does not see his party as having a future in Scotland?

Colin Fox: I will come to the SSP in a second. I have three minutes to go.

Of course, Labour members will not like to hear that Labour's standing in the polls across Britain is at a 20-year low. Tony Blair's spectacular and demonstrable loss of touch, which is evident in the position that he took in supporting Israeli aggression in south Lebanon and in refusing to back off his warmongering, leads us to the hideous prospect of the Tories winning the next election at Westminster.

The famous democratic deficit, when the Tories at Westminster had not a shred of support in Scotland, led to the establishment of the Scottish Parliament. I hope that members of all parties will give serious consideration to the real possibility of another such scenario. Members are well aware that, as Polly Toynbee wrote in *The Guardian*, Labour's strategists are preparing for life in opposition. In such circumstances, acute dissatisfaction on one hand and a democratic deficit on the other will make a potent brew in Scottish politics.

The First Minister says that Scots are enjoying a better quality of life, but people who are poor are not enjoying a better quality of life. Figures published today by the Registrar General for Scotland show that inequalities in health and wealth are widening. I remind the Deputy First Minister, who will close the debate, that reports by the Joseph Rowntree Trust, and NCH—formerly the National Children's Home—show that not an inch of progress has been made in lifting people out of absolute poverty in Britain, despite almost 10 years of a Labour Government. This has been

said before: given the evident wealth in Scotland, which is clear for everyone to see, any poverty is shameful.

The people who have been blown to smithereens in Iraq, such as Gordon Gentle, are not enjoying a better quality of life. The people who have been killed in Afghanistan, such as 24-year-old Private Craig O'Donnell from Clydebank, are not enjoying a better quality of life. I might see the First Minister at the Labour Party conference in Manchester in a fortnight's time; I will be outside the conference, with the peacemongers, while he is inside with the warmongers.

On the stability of the current constitutional settlement, if the Tories and Cameron win down south, independence will rocket back up the political agenda faster than we can say. I can tell Sarah Boyack that the Scottish Socialist Party is passionately in favour of independence. We are proud members of the Scottish independence convention, as are the Greens, the SNP and others. I will attend the independence first march and rally in Edinburgh on 30 September, to highlight how an independent, socialist Scotland would materially advantage working people and allow democratic control of our decisions—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You should finish now, Mr Fox.

Colin Fox: I will finish by saying that an independent, socialist Scotland would be free from poverty and grotesque inequalities. It would be a modern, democratic republic, free from feudal monarchs. It would be democratic and free from the British state—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Fox, you must finish.

Colin Fox: It would reject the politics of hate and narrow-mindedness, irrespective of the culture from which they emerge—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Bruce Crawford.

15:57

Bruce Crawford (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): My sympathies, like those of all members of the Parliament, go out to the families and friends of the UK service personnel who have lost their lives so tragically in the middle east, not just in the past few weeks but in the longer term. Those service personnel were brave and committed people, who were doing a remarkable job in sometimes impossible circumstances.

Our sympathies should also go out to the innocents who have been killed in Iraq and Afghanistan. Perhaps one of the most depressing headlines that I read during the recess announced

that 64 people had been killed in bombings within half an hour. The article was about the 64 people who were killed and 286 who were injured during a spate of bombings in eastern Baghdad last Friday. It said that the UN has calculated that every day during May and June about 100 civilians met a violent death. Iraq's interior ministry estimates that more than 3,000 people died in July.

I raise such matters during a debate on Scotland's future because I know that many members of the Parliament took part in the anti-war demonstration, to declare that the war is not in our name. However, like it or otherwise, we are part of the UK and we are involved in an illegal war. We must all share responsibility for the carnage and despair in Iraq. However, I believe in all sincerity that if Scotland had had control of its armed forces we would never have been complicit in the illegal war and subsequent occupation of Iraq.

We must consider what we would do if we acquired that control and responsibility. We would want to be part of the multinational peacekeeping force that is to help to sort out the mess in southern Lebanon. I am ashamed that our international position and image have been so tarnished by our involvement in the conflict in Iraq that we cannot send peacekeeping troops to Lebanon. Given the choice and the control, the Scottish people would much rather be seen as peacemakers in Lebanon than as war makers in Iraq. That could have been Scotland today. We can still make it Scotland's future.

Unfortunately, we will not have any control over the momentous decision that is soon to be taken on whether the son of Trident and a new era of weapons of mass destruction will be foisted upon the Clyde. Here we are again on the brink of breaking international law. To replace Trident would breach article VI of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, which expects all signatories in good faith to cease the arms race at an early date and to work toward complete disarmament. It is self-evident that replacing Trident could not possibly be seen as working toward disarmament.

To date, I have heard no convincing arguments as to why the UK needs to create the son of Trident. Is it because two or three other nations now possess nuclear weapons? As far as I know, none of them has either the capacity or the motivation to attack the UK. Or is it because of the threat of terrorism? As I have said before, surely that cannot be the case. I would dearly love to know how a suicide bomber who was intent on martyrdom would be stopped as a result of Trident on the Clyde. I simply cannot believe that we would ever deploy a nuclear weapon against a Muslim city, thereby creating a modern-day

Hiroshima that would unleash a truly unimaginable conflagration.

We all know that the truth is that the cold war killed off any intellectual arguments that may have existed for a UK requirement to retain WMDs. It is estimated that to deploy a new nuclear weapons system could cost up to £25 billion. If that decision was in Scotland's hands, I know that most members would rather see those resources used to help build new hospitals and schools and to build a Scotland with a future that is different from the one that it faces.

We face big decisions about the future of our country. We in the SNP have the confidence to say that we want the Parliament to take control of the decision-making process. Members might not like hearing us say that, but we genuinely believe it and we ask others to respect that viewpoint, rather than always fling the mud in our direction. As our amendment states, the very least that we expect is for the Scottish Government to fight Scotland's corner and not to run for cover. The decision on whether to send Scottish troops to war or to have them act as peacemakers should be made here in Scotland. The decisions on how we should arm ourselves, protect our servicemen and servicewomen when in conflict and spend our resources should be made here in Scotland.

We have the confidence to let Scotland decide its future. I sincerely hope that, one day, other members will share that confidence so that together we can build a different future.

16:03

Susan Deacon (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab): In the amazing speech that Donald Dewar delivered at the opening of this institution, he said:

"A Scottish Parliament. Not an end: a means to greater ends."

That one line sums up what we are all about. Have we made progress in delivering those greater ends since we came into being? Of course we have. Do we need to do more to achieve yet greater ends in the future? Absolutely. Surely we must be able to have that debate within and among parties, both now and in the future. As members of the Parliament, we have no greater responsibility than to strive constantly to learn and improve and to do more to realise the hopes and aspirations of the Scottish people.

Of course we will have different views about how that should be achieved, but I have listened carefully to the debate and have heard common themes emerging, even among the speakers on the front benches. The First Minister spoke about the importance of the battle of ideas in the months to come. Nicola Sturgeon spoke about the need to

be positive and have big ideas. Annabel Goldie spoke passionately about her desire to ensure that the Parliament, which she and her party opposed vehemently in the past, works better in the future.

I hold on to those positives, because I think that maybe—just maybe—we can build on them. However, we will not make progress if we are locked in interminable constitutional wrangling, if Opposition parties constantly default to putting all society's ills at the feet of the Executive or if the parties of government are complacent or over-confident. We all know that there is still so much more to do to realise the full potential of devolution and that there is an enormous opportunity to do so.

I am heartened that up and down the land, particularly since devolution, hundreds and thousands of people have been engaged in conversations about what they want their Scotland to look like in the future. There is no shortage of interest in this nation's future. Some 14,000 people came through this Parliament in one week for the festival of politics just a couple of weeks ago, and tens of thousands of youngsters have passed through the doors of our education centre since the Parliament came into being.

Hundreds of thousands of people are involved in all sorts of gatherings and networks—some in this place and some much further afield. The Parliament's futures forum, in which many of us have engaged, is a place where there has been challenging and exciting discussion. The Executive's futures project has taken immense steps forward in considering where we are in the Scotland in which we live. I have listened to all those discussions. In fact, I am so sad that I even listened to the entirety of the First Minister's futures project lecture on the web at 1 o'clock this morning. The point that I took out of that, and all the other work, is that there is a welter of ideas and enthusiasm upon which we can build. We owe it to all the people who are engaging in that work to ensure that those ideas and that enthusiasm and positivity do not get lost in the pre-election horse-trading that is to follow in the months to come.

It might be uncomfortable for us, but we must remember that more than half the Scottish public did not choose any of us at the most recent Scottish Parliament election. We need to reflect on that carefully and do better next time round. In saying that, I make it clear that I do not wear rose-tinted glasses. Given that I have been in the Labour Party for 25 years, they got well trampled on a very long time ago. I know that in the months to come parties will, quite rightly, set out their stall. However, I hope that we can find space within that dynamic and that exchange to be honest about the fact that there are many issues that do not divide

us along party lines and many challenges to which no one party has the answer.

If we are going to rebuild trust and confidence in the body politic we have to conduct that kind of discussion and work with the spectrum of interests and individuals throughout Scotland to ensure that we broker solutions. We have to be open to fresh thinking on issues such as drugs, family breakdown, poverty, climate change, public sector reform and changing behaviour and lifestyles. In a fast-moving world we have to embrace change. We have to consider how we work in this place to ensure that we take decisions better and faster, lift our heads from paper and process, regulate less, lead more, and become more strategic, rather than devil in operational detail.

This has been said often, but it bears repetition: our nation's strongest asset is our people, who want to do more and better in the future and build on our strong heritage. We are already doing wonderful things in our communities, universities, classrooms and elsewhere. We have to be careful that in the weeks and months to come, as we bid for the hits and the headlines, we do not put in place rules, structures or initiatives that might get in the way of our people's enterprise or endeavour in the future.

I am very proud of what Labour in government has achieved at a UK level and in this Parliament, but I also think that all of us are—or should be—big enough to hold up a mirror, listen to what people tell us and ask what we can do better in the future. If we dispense with the language of failure and blame and embrace the language of learning and improvement, we can and will bring a strong future for our Scotland.

16:09

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con):

One of the greatest disappointments of the summer for me was the day I heard the news that Susan Deacon was not going to seek re-election to the Scottish Parliament. Although she and I have different ideas about how Scotland's future might develop, the speech that we have just heard is a sound indication that she has a profound contribution to make, and I hope that, as she said when she made her announcement, that contribution will continue to be made elsewhere.

There have been some very profound speeches today. I am not entirely sure that mine will be as profound as those, and particularly not as profound as the one we have just heard. However, in the spirit of the new politics, I would like to take this opportunity to praise the Scottish Executive and Jack McConnell for displaying a refreshing degree of honesty. No, I am not talking about the speech that the First Minister delivered earlier; I

am talking about a document that was published in the name of the Executive earlier this week, "The Futures Project—The Strategic Audit 2006". I quickly rifled through the document to get to the chapter on the environment. The chapter's introductory page has two bold statements. The first is:

"There are areas where we appear to perform less strongly",

which is a terrific confession. That statement is followed by this one:

"Our record on the Environment indicates room for improvement".

There is certainly some progress there.

It is true that, particularly in the past few years, the Scottish Parliament has become far more preoccupied with environmentally based issues, which is only right. That has been driven partly by the presence of the Green representatives in the Parliament—who have, as I have said before, become the green conscience of us all—and partly by the internationally recognised need to deal with major problems such as climate change and its primary causes. However, while trying to make progress in relation to the relevant targets, the Executive has, in some cases, found itself performing "less strongly", as it says. It is, therefore, important that we consider why that is happening and how we can make changes.

Many of us agree that if we are to deal with climate change, energy efficiency in the home and in business and the promotion of microgeneration will be essential. However, it remains important that the Executive addresses the charge that that will levy against individuals and businesses and how those who are least able to afford it can put money up front in order to reap the benefits.

It is also important that we make some difficult decisions in relation to clean energy. With regard to electricity generation, we know that the Executive has a 40 per cent target for renewables by 2020. However, the opportunities for Scotland to go further and generate the other 60 per cent of our electricity in ways that do not put CO₂ into the environment are also available to us. We must continue to promote debate about and investment in clean coal and—yes—nuclear technology, if that is the right way to go.

Chris Ballance (South of Scotland) (Green):
Will the member give way?

Alex Johnstone: I am sorry, but I am moving on.

The Scottish Executive has been guilty of making one or two dreadful mistakes in recent years. One of the worst mistakes has been the creation of Scottish Water. In my opinion, that body was constructed more to serve dogma than

to serve the people who rely on Scottish Water for water and sewerage services. The development constraints that have been caused by lack of investment and the charging structure, which is disproportionate in many cases, particularly for small businesses, have led to a situation in which Scottish Water is a system of taxation and a de facto planning agency across large areas of Scotland. The Scottish Executive needs to address that. A future Executive that had any influence from the Conservative party would have to consider ways of restructuring the Scottish water industry in order to deliver the investment that is needed to begin to relieve the problems.

Jeremy Purvis: Could the member explain how private companies in a privatised water industry would have as their priority community development and community plans rather than their own shareholders? That seems bizarre.

Alex Johnstone: The member makes some outlandish assumptions about what I would propose. For a number of years, our primary proposal has been the mutualisation of the company as a way of freeing it from the constraints that were placed on it by the Executive when it was established.

In the time that is left to me, I will deal with issues that affect rural Scotland. There are serious problems with market failure in our rural primary industries. We need the support of the Scottish Executive to continue to campaign for work to be done to limit the power of supermarkets. The Executive needs to do more than it is already doing to develop alternative marketing strategies for primary producers in rural areas. That means that the success of farmers markets must be built on. Opportunities must be taken to encourage, promote and advertise the quality of Scottish produce, bearing in mind how that would encourage market development.

We need to do something about the rural development programmes. The rural stewardship scheme has been a catastrophe this year. We need the Minister for Environment and Rural Development to take some action on that. It is important that we consider rural Scotland to be a bigger priority than the Executive has considered it.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh): I call Des McNulty. Following his speech, there might be a brief opportunity for Mr Swinburne.

16:16

Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab): I congratulate Alex Johnstone, not so much on the content of his speech but on the efforts that he has clearly been taking over the summer to

reduce his environmental footprint. He is a lesson to us all.

When considering big ideas, we can often get lost in interesting themes or in those ideas that seem attractive just because they are new. As somebody who has been in representative politics for a long time, I say that the focus needs to be on the impact of policies on the places that we represent. My attitude in politics is always to focus on Clydebank and on what the policies of the Executive and the Opposition will mean for the people whom I represent.

Clydebank has a particular history. Perhaps more than anywhere else in Scotland, it was devastated during the Thatcher years, with the loss of the Singer factory, followed by the slow, protracted and painful decline of its shipyard, which was the birthplace of the three queens. That shipyard and that industry were strangled by indifference on the part of the Conservative Government. It was not until Labour came to power that some of Clydebank's wounds could begin to be addressed.

We suffered very high levels of unemployment, which have been reduced substantially. We had high levels of youth unemployment, which has just about been eliminated. The transmission of disadvantage through the generations through economic inactivity has been substantially addressed through the efforts of the Labour Government, by bringing in nursery places for every three and four-year-old; by thinking about how we can get single parents as well as parents in relationships into work, through making work more directly available to them and fitting it into their circumstances; and by improving training for people who perhaps have not had all the educational opportunities that they could have had while, at the same time, allowing them to build up their education.

Those are policies that Labour stands for, but not just in terms of words—they are being delivered in Clydebank. I went round a number of schools over the summer, speaking to head teachers. Universally, they said that, over the past 10 years, there has been substantial investment and substantial policy change, almost all of which has been associated with significant improvement in the quality of what has been delivered and in the morale of the teaching profession. We hear the same thing from people working in the health sector. We will get moans about this or that minor frustration but, if we ask them what equipment they have, how well paid they are, how well they can treat their patients and what they can now do that they could not do before, we hear a positive message.

The message from the people of Clydebank is that substantial progress is being made under the

policies of the present Administration. I want that progress to be made at a faster rate than over the past five years, not dislodged, hindered or taken away, as I suspect it would be by some of the SNP's policies. Over the next three or four years, more than £100 million is due to be spent on new school and college buildings in my constituency. One of the things that I will be telling my constituents is that, if they let Alex Salmond in, he will not want that to happen. It is a straight choice: new schools and better education under Labour, or no schools under the SNP.

Let us talk about the Golden Jubilee national hospital in Clydebank. One significant achievement of the Labour Administration has been the sensible decision to take over that hospital, which had been underutilised, and put it to effective use as a specialist cardiac facility. It has served patients and reduced waiting lists. That was a practical solution adopted by Labour to make things better for people. Was it supported by the SNP? No. We heard today from Nanette Milne, and it was not supported by the Conservatives either. Why not? What is it about that hospital and what it is doing that they do not like? Go and speak to the patients: they say that it is fantastic. They get top-quality treatment quicker and more effectively than they would have done. Not only is it a practical solution for the patients, it is a great solution for the people of Clydebank, as it will also be the biggest source of employment in the area.

What are people talking about in Clydebank? They are talking about jobs, education, health and crime. What did Kenny MacAskill have to say on Monday? He said that crime figures were going down because there were fewer young people. That is an interesting sociological analysis: there are fewer of the kind of people who create crime, so crime is going down. He clearly thinks that it has nothing to do with antisocial behaviour legislation that Labour introduced and the SNP opposed, nothing to do with the alternatives to custody that are being introduced, and nothing to do with our efforts to deal with the associated problems of drink and drugs. Those things had to be done, and although they might not have been entirely successful yet, I am clear that, for the people of Clydebank who want their area to be regenerated with new schools, better housing and improved health, we are getting there. If I am re-elected—I hope that I will be—I will certainly be arguing for more for Clydebank.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I can give Mr Swinburne a couple of minutes.

16:22

John Swinburne (Central Scotland) (SSCUP): I will squeeze in as much as I can.

We are constantly being derided by Westminster MPs on the Barnett formula. Here is my alternative: hold a referendum to determine whether the people of Scotland want fiscal autonomy. If, as I expect, their answer is yes, we can tell Westminster what it can do with its Barnett formula.

There is an election looming. In the next few years, who would put money on new Labour winning a fourth term in office? Certainly not me, or any serious-minded psephologist—it is hard to get my tongue round that word when I am trying to hurry up. What image does that conjure up? I think it could be a return to the dark days of 1984 when, despite Labour being solidly returned in Scotland, our nation was industrially and industriously destroyed by the policies of Maggie Thatcher. The heart of Scottish manufacturing was torn out. Steel making, shipbuilding, engineering and coal mining were taken out of the Scottish equation. For 18 long years, Scotland laboured under the Conservative yoke. At that time, I hoped that someone would come forward with a unilateral declaration of independence, but that did not happen.

So that members understand where I am coming from, I should make it clear that I am an instinctive socialist who fervently believes in equality and fairness for all. How could I be anything else when my father, grandfather and great-grandfather were all proud miners? They were hard-working, hard-handed men of toil dedicated to socialism, unlike the soft-handed brand of theoretical socialists of today, who seem to be intent on waging a class war in the courts of the land.

I no longer seek UDI, because Scotland now has a better alternative—devolution. It is time for Holyrood to flex its muscles and gain additional powers within the union. With fiscal autonomy, Scotland can have a much better future. We must have fiscal autonomy.

16:24

Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): A few issues have arisen in the debate and I will deal with three of them before addressing the speeches. First, the SNP asked about our attitude to independence. I will quote from our manifesto for the 2005 Westminster election, as our position has not changed. It says:

"Greens support calls for an independent Scotland—not out of nationalistic fervour, but as a means to create a more sustainable and democratic system of government. Such constitutional changes will come about only if people in Scotland want them and support them in referendums.

We see independence as a process, not an event, and look forward to the Scottish Parliament and local

government assuming more powers and an increasing relevance to Scotland.”

That is our position on independence.

Bruce Crawford *rose—*

Robin Harper: I will take no questions at this stage.

Secondly, floated in the press fairly recently has been a rumour that we have a pact with the SNP. I state here and now that we have no pact with the SNP. We have talked to the SNP and we would be happy to speak to other parties.

Thirdly, after the election, if a party—we will not be specific—seeks our support, we will judge whether to support it not only on how well our manifestos sit together but on how we can deliver for people who voted for us their expectations of us by using responsibly any power that we may be granted by the formation of a new Government.

Jeremy Purvis: Solidarity.

Robin Harper: No. Members can see that we are forming a visual that shows that the Greens are united.

The First Minister's speech was relatively predictable. A major issue that he raised was that globalisation is the megatrend, which the Green party is concerned about. We are the party that has devoted more time to thinking about how we deal with the negative effects of globalisation on our economy and our social life and we will continue to develop such policies. The bottom line is that we need to do more to support local economies and to combat the most negative aspects of globalisation, not the least of which is the increasing power of the supermarkets and how they treat our farmers. I see a nod even from the Conservatives at that.

Nicola Sturgeon attacked Labour in the first half of her speech, which was again predictable. After that, she devoted seven minutes to other matters. How can we cavil at what she said? She said that we should cut class sizes and tackle the problems of student debt. She quoted a fairly large number of Green party policies on nuclear power and said what the SNP would not do.

Euan Robson said that the future of Scotland lies in its people. He talked about changing the learning environment and enhancing recreational and exercise opportunities. I hope that in the Liberal Democrats' plans for the four years after May next year, they decide to ensure that private finance initiative schools are built not to minimum sustainability standards but to the highest standards, that they are not, as the one in Dingwall will be, built on playing fields, and that they are not—as they routinely seem to be—built

under unsustainable pacts that result in the loss of free space for children.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: One minute.

Robin Harper: My goodness.

A figure for everybody is that Scotland has 80 acres of golf course but only 1 acre of free amenity open space for every child. Something needs to be done about that.

I will be brief. It was a pleasure to listen to Sarah Boyack, Margo MacDonald and Susan Deacon, who all gave excellent speeches that were up to the highest standards, which is what the Parliament should expect of all of us.

Finally, I thank Alex Johnstone for his comments on the Greens being the green conscience of the Parliament. We will continue to be that conscience for as many years as we are elected to the Parliament. However, I must comment on a remark that he made about accepting nuclear power.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Your time is up, so you must be quick.

Robin Harper: As my time is up, I will sit down. I thank you for your patience.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That is very good of you, Mr Harper. I hope that every member will be as disciplined as you are.

16:31

Ms Wendy Alexander (Paisley North) (Lab):

This has been an interesting debate. As it moves to a close, I invite members to consider the amendments that are before us.

Unaccountably, the Tories' amendment seems to have overlooked the big idea of their leader, David Cameron, for Scotland's future—that in future, all Scots who are elected to the Westminster Parliament to represent their fellow Scots should become second-class members of that Parliament. Little wonder that not one of the Holyrood Tories—the old Tories—is trumpeting the new Tories' big idea for Scotland. I have a word of advice for our old Tories in Scotland: beware. They may be about to enjoy the irrelevance, ignominy and isolation that old Labour has enjoyed under Tony Blair.

At first, I thought that the summer sunshine had shone a ray of light into the SNP's darkest passages, as there is nothing in its amendment that despairs of the performance of the Scottish economy. The Jeremiahs have gone to ground. It is certainly hard to argue against the highest-ever employment level, the lowest unemployment level and Scotland being a European leader.

However, there is always the question of growth, to which I now turn. We could not hope for the SNP to welcome the fact that Scottish standards of living are rising faster than standards in the rest of the UK or that Scotland has grown in every single year since devolution, or to admit that that record has been unmatched by all our principal competitors, such as France, Germany and the US.

Mr Swinney: Wendy Alexander was careful to say that there has been economic growth in every year, but she did not reinforce the statement on the Scottish Labour Party's website that

"The Scottish economy has grown in every quarter over the past three years".

As that statement is patent nonsense, will she withdraw it? Will she also explain why the Scottish growth rate is poorer than that of our European competitors?

Ms Alexander: I have the highest respect for the member and will deal with his point. We are quibbling about growth in one of 20 quarters. I am sure that the statisticians will resolve the matter, but I say to him that in the first years of devolution—from 1999 to 2003—Scotland's standard of living rose faster than the OECD average, despite the tough times in electronics. Only pure prejudice could have led John Swinney to label such success as "appalling".

I return to the argument that I was trying to make. The SNP's amendment offers a return to an old song for the nationalists. It calls for more cash for child poverty and education, the wiping out of all past and present student debt and the cutting of council tax and rates bills for good measure. There are no prizes for guessing that the SNP's old song—"Hey, Big Spender"—is back with a vengeance.

So far, so familiar. However, if some things never change, some things do. Let us consider the I-word—the *raison d'être* for every nationalist being in politics and the rationale that brought every nationalist into politics. Independence was mentioned in the opening line of Ms Sturgeon's speech and at the coda, but there was precious little about it in between. The SNP's Holyrood representatives have relegated independence to a mere mantra. This summer, they admitted that all they want is the next nine months to be about two horses—Jack and Alex. If there are only two in the race, I am not sure where that leaves Ms Sturgeon—perhaps stuck in the starting blocks.

As we heard from the First Minister, 3 May is not a race; it is a choice about our future. The SNP in Holyrood fights shy of a debate about competing visions for the common connections for the 2 million of us who have family in England, for the nearly 1 million of us who work in the rest of the

UK and for all the economic networks that will nourish our future success. We on this side of the chamber have faith in those ties that bind, and the fear is all on the SNP's side—the fear of spelling out the very idea that brought the SNP into politics.

The SNP's Holyrood hopefuls—the independence-lite tendency—want this election to be about competing bribes over the Barnett billions. However, the people of Scotland are not so daft. They know that this is Salmond's last stand; they know that it is not peelie-wallie independence-lite that he is about. When we read about the first 100 days, we see nothing on education, nothing on crime, nothing on the environment, but the I-word up there in lights.

The Scots do not want to break the link. They want to build, not to weaken; they want to create, not to divide. We on this side of the chamber will not let them down.

16:36

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):

It is nice to hear Wendy Alexander back in action and on song, although with regard to the content of her speech I think that we would have got more sense out of the twins.

The First Minister opened the debate by trumpeting the success of his Administration. At one point, I thought that he was even going to claim credit for the sunshine that we have had over the summer. The First Minister's view of Scotland is almost unrecognisable from the experience of millions of Scots. He talked up education on the same day that CBI Scotland produced its own report on the future of Scotland, which states:

"The quality of performance of local authorities, schools and teachers varies across the country and we desperately need to achieve consistency, based on the standards set by the best, not the average.

Schools are failing to engage meaningfully with too many young people, leaving them far short of being 'work-ready', often with few or no qualifications at all and little to show for the years spent in classrooms.

As a consequence, Scottish businesses have to invest an unacceptably high proportion of the £2bn they commit to training annually, on what is effectively remedial education".

That is what our employers and wealth creators are saying and—with respect—I am more inclined to believe them than Scottish ministers.

The First Minister said that our health service had been turned around. I concede that it is increasingly unrecognisable from the national health service that we had 10 years ago. I accept—as did Dr Nanette Milne—that huge sums of money have been invested in the health service, but in many cases the changes that have

been made have been for the worse, not for the better. I will give three examples. Ten years ago, if someone felt ill in the middle of the night and needed medical help, they could phone up their local GP practice and their local doctor or a member of his practice or a joint practice would come out and see them. Now, they would have to phone up NHS 24, with all the problems that surround that organisation.

Mr Kerr: Would the member care to take the matter up with the Scottish General Practitioners Committee of the British Medical Association, which voted to opt out of that service on behalf of the 3,500 members that it represents? The NHS had to respond to that by delivering a service that was designed here in Scotland and that is now performing absolutely in terms of patient response times. It was GPs who opted out of the out-of-hours service, not the NHS.

Murdo Fraser: The Minister for Health and Community Care is seeking to defend the producers' interest. I would have thought that he should seek to defend the interests of patients and negotiate a contract in the interests of patients instead of giving in to the GPs, no matter what they have to say. But, no, we have a health minister who does not seem to want to do that.

My second example concerns dentistry. Ten years ago, most people in Scotland had access to an NHS dentist. Today, across the country such dentists are as rare as hen's teeth.

Jeremy Purvis: Will the member give way?

Murdo Fraser: I will not give way at the moment.

Whereas, 10 years ago, Scotland had a network of hospitals that were fit for purpose, with hospitals being opened or expanded, we now see—year by year, month by month, week by week—only a list of hospital closures and downgrades. The long list includes Perth royal infirmary; Forth Park hospital, Kirkcaldy; Queen Margaret hospital, Dunfermline; Stirling royal infirmary; Falkirk royal infirmary; St John's hospital, Livingston; Monklands hospital; Stobhill hospital; Victoria infirmary; Hairmyres hospital, East Kilbride; Ayr hospital; the Royal Victoria hospital, Edinburgh; and Jedburgh and Coldstream cottage hospitals. All of those have been either downgraded or closed by the Executive.

Christine May *rose*—

Jeremy Purvis *rose*—

Murdo Fraser: I cannot believe that those who voted Labour in 1997, 1999 or 2003 thought that they were voting for the downgrading or closure of hospitals and the running down of the NHS. Whisper it in the streets of Coatbridge and on the roads of Airdrie: Scotland's health service was

better off under the Tories. People's experience of the health service was better.

I will give way to Jeremy Purvis.

Jeremy Purvis: If the member's entire thesis is that the Executive has given in to GPs, why on earth would Tory policy give more power to those very people?

Murdo Fraser: For hospital operations, we believe in trusting the profession, but that does not mean that the health minister should give in to the demands of professionals on every matter of contract and on every single issue. However, let me move on.

On infrastructure, we have heard many promises over the past 10 years but seen precious little delivery. What a contrast that makes to the billions that were invested under the previous Conservative Government. That Government built hospitals, whereas the Executive is running them down or closing them down. We expanded public transport, opened new roads and built new motorways to allow our economy to expand, whereas the Executive has a huge queue of projects that includes the A8000—which is still waiting to be upgraded from single carriageway—an A9 that is still to be dualled and the desperately needed commitment to a new Forth crossing.

Christine May: Will the member give way?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member is in his final minute.

Murdo Fraser: By next year, we will have had 10 wasted years in which there has been no infrastructural investment and no forward movement. Under the current Administration, Scotland is going backwards not forwards.

Scotland is crying out for a change. People are fed up with the stagnation and decline under Labour and the Liberal Democrats. The SNP does not offer a real alternative. It might offer a change of passport, but it offers no change of policy. The SNP presents no ideological opposition to the current regime as it is part of the same tired old left-of-centre consensus that has failed Scotland for too long. The SNP's approach is summed up and encapsulated in the bald statistic that the SNP has opposed just six of the 84 Executive bills that have been passed in the past seven years. Shona Robison told us that the SNP does not believe in opposition for opposition's sake. On those figures, the SNP hardly believes in opposition at all.

Shona Robison: Will the member take an intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: No, the member must close.

Murdo Fraser: By contrast, the Scottish Conservatives offer a real alternative for an

enterprising dynamic Scotland in which people have access to the high-quality public services that they deserve. Over the next eight months, more and more Scots will see it our way.

16:43

Mr Kenny MacAskill (Lothians) (SNP): This has been a wide-ranging debate, in which there have been many excellent speeches from individuals on the front and back benches and in particular, as Robin Harper mentioned, from Susan Deacon. I agree with a lot of what she said. As she knows, I agree with her that many matters need to be dealt with on a much more consensual basis. Like my colleague Shona Robison—our opposition to the Tories is quite clear—I do not believe that we should subscribe to opposition for opposition's sake. Perhaps the Tory front bench in Holyrood disagrees with David Cameron and subscribes to the Tories' irredentist tendency that regrets the apology for opposing the African National Congress and perhaps even opposes Nelson Mandela's liberation. However, we believe that there are times when Opposition parties need to be constructive.

Where I differ from Susan Deacon is that I believe that there are debates in the Parliament that are not just procedural but are about where we come from. Just as we have an official opening, there are times in the political calendar when we need to consider not simply the practicalities and the individual sections and subsections that are before us but the bigger picture. This is one of those debates. As this debate is about Scotland's future, it must move on from the consensus politics that is sometimes required and return to politics as a contact sport, which politics remains in some instances.

It is important that we have set-piece debates such as this, because we are at that juncture in our parliamentary session when we are looking towards the next election and parties are beginning to finalise matters. That has a downside, but it also has an important aspect and it is part of democracy, because the elections next year will be fundamental for what will happen in the four years after that. The debate gives the Government and the First Minister an opportunity to lay out their stall and it gives the Opposition the opportunity to do likewise. It is a matter of saying not only where we are going but where we have come from. It is not just about what the Government is pledging to deliver but about what it has in fact delivered while in office. That is where we believe that the Liberal-Labour Executive has been found wanting, because it has failed on many accounts in its ambitions and in practice. Despite the First Minister's mantra of doing less better, to some extent the Government

has failed to do less and it has most certainly not done better.

As we have just come back to Parliament, it is also important for us to make reference to village Holyrood and to the fact that the Parliament cannot live in isolation. There is a bigger picture out there and it is absurd that the First Minister is not prepared to put on record what his position is vis-à-vis the Prime Minister. Even as today's debate has gone on, newsletters and news items have been released about further resignations of parliamentary private secretaries and ministers in the Labour Government down south.

The future of Blair will not only have an impact on the election in Scotland next year; it is having an impact on Scotland at this very moment. We expect the First Minister to say whether he supports Tony Blair and whether he will be siding with Gordon Brown when he comes up to Scotland looking for support in his challenge for the leadership, the nuclear option for the resignation apparently having been set by him and his cronies. We need to know, otherwise there will be a hiatus in Scottish politics because we will be trying to get on with the work rate here while having no control over the huge impact of the destabilisation caused by the civil war and fratricide in the Labour Government.

What of the future laid out by the First Minister? He majored on child poverty. Of course it is important that we address child poverty, which scars and blights Scotland and which is fundamentally wrong. Those in my age group can remember signing up for the SNP when we saw poverty in a land that had newly discovered oil and thought that it was a tragedy. If that is the First Minister's future, let us get real. I am not a betting man, but I wager that not one political party will go into the election next year calling for an increase in child poverty or to make it worse. I also hazard a guess that there has never been a political party, or indeed a parliamentary candidate in any country in the world, that has stood on a mantra or an election platform of making child poverty worse. If that is the height of the First Minister's ambition, he is simply giving us more rhetoric with little action, when what we need to do is address the matter.

Christine May: Will the member give way?

Mr MacAskill: Not at the moment.

By next May, Labour will have been in power for 10 years and, as Margo MacDonald pointed out, we will have had the union for 300 years. It is time for a change, because Labour has failed and the union, as she pointed out, is not working in Scotland's interest. She capably answered Bristow Muldoon's question, "What about Ireland?" The fact is that Ireland is a member of the European

Union. That changes everything in terms of the Irish economy and in terms of our opportunity.

Bristow Muldoon: Will Mr MacAskill answer the question that Mr Swinney would not answer? For how many decades did Ireland lag behind the UK after it broke away?

Mr MacAskill: The Irish Free State was not a member of the European Union, as Bristow Muldoon would know if he had listened to Ms MacDonald. She will view this as the political black spot from me but, in her excellent speech, which was roundly applauded by SNP members, she pointed out the significant change that has occurred in international alliances and international trade. We signed up in 1707 because we needed access to the North American colonies; otherwise, Glasgow would not have become the city that it became. We are now in the World Trade Organisation and the European Union, in a world where we are moving towards fewer currencies, not more. We do not need to be part of Great Britain. We can get better benefits by being an independent nation, as Ireland and other nations have proved.

The First Minister: I have a simple question. Would that independent Scotland have as its currency the euro or sterling?

Mr MacAskill: The First Minister is well aware that we support membership of the euro. We believe that if Scotland goes in at the right rate, it will be beneficial. That is something that is supported overwhelmingly by the business community—[*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Mr MacAskill: I am baffled as to why the First Minister had to ask that question, but his position—[*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Mr MacAskill: Doubtless the Deputy First Minister can talk about his position.

The First Minister trumpeted the number of visitors as a success. I will highlight why we need constitutional change. Edinburgh has done remarkably well and I am immensely proud to live in this city, but we should be doing much better. We should be competing with the likes of Ireland, which outperforms us in tourism and in the economy. We should be allowing other areas to prosper in addition to the Condé Nast celebrity areas of Edinburgh and Glasgow. Why do they not do so? That is because of the high pound, high VAT and high fuel taxes. We are struggling on almost every one of those issues and must address them.

The First Minister mentioned the security challenge. He is right to say that we live in

troubled times. I acknowledge that there are restrictions on the Parliament but, as Robin Harper and others mentioned, over the summer the Parliament and the country had to put up with weapons being landed on our soil on their way to the crisis in the middle east. We regret bitterly what is happening in the middle east. Nobody is suggesting that Scotland can intercede and stop the war between Lebanon and Israel, but we should not be fuelling one side by allowing our airports to be used as munition-ways to one particular side.

The Government of the Republic of Ireland, whose economy and outlook Mr McConnell denigrates, took a stand that the Irish people signed up to. Mr McConnell not only allowed our laws to be broken by allowing those weapons to be brought in, but went against the very values that the people of Scotland sign up to, that we oppose fuelling war and allowing devastation and destruction to take place. That is why the future of Scotland is not with Mr McConnell but with the Scottish National Party. We look forward to the next election. [*Applause.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Nicol Stephen will close for the Executive. He has 10 minutes, which will start from when the applause ends.

16:52

The Deputy First Minister and Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Nicol Stephen): It is always a pleasure to follow Kenny MacAskill and I have followed his political journey. I can remember him sitting on the back benches as the arch-fundamentalist, but he now sits alongside Nicola Sturgeon as the constructive, consensual, well-paced and reasonable new SNP politician whom we saw the briefest flashes of today.

I will focus on three matters: young people, enterprise in Scotland and renewable energy. I believe that in future in this Parliament we should strive to do more for young people to capture their imaginations, spark their enthusiasm, give them a voice, listen to their views and get them involved in politics.

There is a lesson for all political parties in the turnout at elections and in the engagement of young people in politics today. If we can inspire young people and give them the creativity and the confidence to challenge what they see and to dream great things, they will have the power to influence their own lives, their own futures and Scotland's future. This chamber should spend a great deal of its time energising, exciting and involving young people.

We should never stop thinking about tomorrow's education and how we can make it more relevant

and interesting to more young people. The excitement that we can create in education in Scotland should be followed by the opportunity for young people to be part of the world of enterprise and part of dynamic, global, international businesses. We are working to build the industries of Scotland's future—ones that can give Scotland a competitive edge and keep pace with the growth of developing nations.

When I meet business around Scotland, I meet some of the biggest global corporations in financial services. They choose Scotland because of the strength and depth of our skills. They do not ask me for independence. We have invested in those skills and attract more graduates than ever before to live and work in Scotland. That is a very good thing.

I have seen some of Scotland's most exciting companies. New companies have started up in life sciences, creating world-class solutions for health here in Scotland. For example, last year 20 per cent of Europe's initial public offerings in life sciences were Scottish. Those companies do not ask me for independence.

In energy, we have skills in the offshore industry that can create a truly global industry in marine power. We have in Scotland the capacity to supply 25 per cent of Europe's wind energy and a quarter of all Europe's tidal energy. We have that potential and it is up to us to realise it. We have the world-class universities and research, and we have the skills and technology from the offshore industry that directly transfer into this new industry of the future.

I have seen the companies myself: Ross Deeptech Initiatives Ltd and BioFab, making the Pelamis machine using workers and sheds in Stonehaven and Methil. There is a lot going on in Scotland and some great people are making it happen and creating the future. They do not ask for independence. What they want is world-class education in our schools, universities and colleges.

We have a target of having 53,000 teachers for Scotland's schools by next year, which is a growth of thousands of teachers at a time when the drop in pupil numbers could have meant that teacher numbers could drop as well. That shows the scale of our commitment. Teacher recruitment is up, applications for teacher training are up and intakes are up by more than 100 per cent in many subjects.

The brightest and the best in Scotland are now queuing up to be teachers. That is a good thing and that is thanks to this Executive and its education policies.

Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP): Perhaps the minister might explain why, if all those teachers

are being trained, our class sizes are not coming down and why the Executive cannot tell the chamber what the results of class-size reductions are?

Nicol Stephen: Fiona Hyslop knows that class sizes are coming down and that we have a commitment to a maximum class size of 25 in primary 1 and of 20 for English and mathematics in secondary 1 and S2. We have been planning for the future and some time ago we made the commitment to the McCrone changes. Never forget that Fiona Hyslop and the SNP objected to McCrone from the very start. They accused the McCrone committee of going nowhere fast; they got it wrong, so wrong in fact that Nicola Sturgeon had to come to the chamber in June 2000 and admit:

"I have waited to be proved wrong ... the report of the McCrone committee provides us with that opportunity."—*[Official Report, 22 June 2000; Vol 7, c 618.]*

We have strong achievements in other areas. For a future of good health, the Executive and the Parliament have led the way. In fact, I think that on all sides the promotion of good health has been one of the successes of devolution and has moved the debate on. The smoking ban is hugely significant, helping us to tackle our biggest avoidable killer and to take action for the longer term.

We are getting better treatment as well. We committed ourselves to maximum waits for treatment of six months. Members will remember that people waited for 18 months under the supposedly better health service that some members recall. When we made our commitment, 60,000 people were waiting for more than six months. The SNP decided that that was too tough a target and asked us eagerly whether we would resign if we did not make it. Last week's figures confirmed for the third time that we have consistently made it and continue to hit our targets. With this Executive, long waits are down from 60,000 people to zero. That is because we have put the investment in. Hundreds of millions of pounds of new investment has been made in new hospitals and facilities, while nursing numbers are up by 4,000 and doctor numbers are up by 1,600. Our investment gets results.

In Aberdeen, I saw how extra nurses and investment have been used innovatively to reduce waiting times at the neurological clinic at a local hospital from a shocking 67 weeks to just four weeks. That is a fantastic transformation and a huge tribute to the commitment of our NHS staff. Many will be shocked to hear today that the Tories want to get rid of shorter waiting times and those targets.

No one can accuse the SNP of lacking the capacity to dream. On the one hand, it has its list

of tax cuts for income tax, council tax, business rates, corporation tax, whisky duty and petrol tax—all would be cut under an SNP Government. On the other hand, its spending pledges continue to go up and up. What was it recently? The SNP pledged billions for students and for pre-school, hundreds of millions for the elderly, and tens of millions in every local area in every local press release from every SNP MSP—that is one expensive political party. Do not worry though: Jim Mather says that it is okay. He says that this is not a zero-sum game. He is right—it is a multibillion-pound game that will cost business and the taxpayers of this country dearly.

Jim Mather (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I am grateful for having my name mentioned. I challenge the minister to come and debate this issue in front of a neutral audience and to see what happens. Will he debate it?

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): Mr Stephen, you have about two more minutes.

Nicol Stephen: We will continue to debate it and we will continue to win the argument.

At a recent by-election, Alex Salmond admitted:

“You simply can’t have tax cuts and keep public services going.”

From the SNP front bench, Christine Grahame said last year:

“We need to raise taxes”.—[*Official Report*, 19 January 2005; c 13601.]

However, nowhere does the SNP have greater plans and visions for the future than in energy—wait for this.

Let us put to one side for the moment the two ways that the party faces on renewable energy—criticising slow progress when in the chamber, but calling for moratoriums on wind power when outside the chamber, whenever it suits the party to do so. Let us hear instead about the SNP’s bigger plans, as set out in the party’s “Scottish Energy Review”. It is all here—all that we would expect.

There is a foreword from Alex Salmond in London, and a spectacular commitment on tidal energy. Here is what the SNP says about the Pentland firth:

“If we look at the Admiralty charts through the eyes of a fluid dynamicist it is clear that the placement of the islands of Stroma and Swoma is sub-optimal.”

George Orwell would love what follows. The SNP proposes to remove

“circular bores from the core of the island down to ... below the ... depth of the main channel”.

Doing this

“will leave an outer shell formed as a series of thin walls with circular interiors, rather like a honeycomb built by very different sizes of bee.”

Do members want the rest of the quotation?

Members: More!

Nicol Stephen: Okay—due to popular demand.

“This structure will be strong while it remains as a group of continuous shells, but will collapse if the web continuity is destroyed. If this is done by blasting selected internal walls at slack low water, a large fraction of the debris will fall into the bottoms of the bore holes to leave a ‘level’ surface. The output of aggregate would be more than from the ... super-quarry.”

[*Interruption.*] However much heckling I get from the SNP, I point out that there is a Caithness tourism website called “Stroma View”, which might as well pack up, because the SNP is going to sink those two islands out of view.

The Presiding Officer: Minister, you must wind up please.

Nicol Stephen: “Where or what next?” we ask ourselves. Well, the last sentence that I will read is rather chilling:

“Scotland is not short of lonely islands”.

The Presiding Officer: We have run four minutes over time, minister.

Nicol Stephen: I will stop there—I think that I have made the point.

People in Scotland support two parties that put aside their differences and work together; they have rejected independence time and again and they will reject it again in May next year.

Business Motions

17:04

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): The next item of business is consideration of business motions S2M-4737, S2M-4751 and S2M-4753, in the name of Margaret Curran, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out timetables for legislation.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Tourist Boards (Scotland) Bill at Stage 2 be completed by 29 September 2006.

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Aquaculture and Fisheries (Scotland) Bill at Stage 1 be completed by 15 December 2006.

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Transport and Works (Scotland) Bill at Stage 1 be completed by 24 November 2006.—[*Ms Margaret Curran.*]

Motions agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): The next item of business is consideration of two Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask Margaret Curran to move motion S2M-4747, on rule 9.6.3A, and motion S2M-4748, on the remit of the Communities Committee.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees under Rule 9.6.3A that the Parliament shall consider the general principles of the Legal Profession and Legal Aid (Scotland) Bill on the fourth sitting day after the publication of the lead committee report.

That the Parliament agrees that the remit of the Communities Committee be amended to—

To consider and report on matters relating to housing and area regeneration, poverty, voluntary sector issues, charity law; matters relating to the land use planning system and building standards; such other matters as fall within the responsibility of the Minister for Communities; and health promotion and nutrition in schools.—[*Ms Margaret Curran.*]

17:06

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): After the high jinks of the previous debate, it is possible that my request will seem like small beer, but I ask the Parliament to give serious thought to motion S2M-4748 before voting on it.

In common with other members, I recognise the importance of health promotion and nutrition in schools, and what I say is in no way intended to undermine that. If the Parliament decides to ask us to consider the proposed bill on that subject, all members of the Communities Committee will do as serious and thorough a job as we can.

However, the proposed addition to the Communities Committee's remit is not a reasonable one to make. The change is being made so that another piece of legislation can be squeezed in before the present parliamentary session comes to a close. I ask the Parliament not to allow our committee system to turn into a legislative production line.

The job of scrutinising the work of Government and holding ministers to account is about more than just passing bills. Since the 2003 election, the Communities Committee—which already has a broad remit that covers issues of importance to the most excluded people in Scotland and the communities that are hardest hit by poverty—has had almost no time to direct its own work or to carry out its own inquiries; it has spent almost all its time dealing with legislation. Although it has done so conscientiously and with care, it should have time to carry out its own inquiries.

Another part of the committee's remit, which is part of the remit of all committees, is to conduct post-legislative scrutiny. At the moment, we are considering the Planning etc (Scotland) Bill, a large number of the provisions of which do not appear in the bill itself but will be included in regulations and guidance. If the Communities Committee's successor in the next session is treated in the same way and is turned into a legislative sausage machine, it will be unable to devote the time that is required to carry out proper post-legislative scrutiny of the Planning etc (Scotland) Bill and the other legislation that the present committee has dealt with.

Therefore, I ask the Parliament not to allow the committee system to be used in the way that is proposed and to oppose motion S2M-4748.

17:08

The Minister for Parliamentary Business (Ms Margaret Curran): I thank the Greens for alerting me to the fact that they intend to oppose Parliamentary Bureau motion S2M-4748.

I put on record the fact that I take extremely seriously the commitments of the Parliament's committees, acknowledge their contribution to the process of legislative scrutiny and the other work that they do and recognise the expertise that they have developed. However, it is stretching things a bit to describe the committees as legislative sausage machines; I do not think that that description is appropriate. The people of Scotland send us here to legislate and our job as legislators should be a priority.

That said, I am sure that all business managers would acknowledge that I have gone to extreme lengths to accommodate the Parliament's workload. I have sought to negotiate with them to an extent that is not necessarily required of me and to involve them in the solutions that we come up with. I fully understand that people do not like it when they get a phone call or a knock on the door from a business manager who suggests that they take on extra work, but I plead with the Parliament by emphasising our responsibility to get the proposed bill through.

Although the pressure of work on other committees meant that I had little alternative but to allocate the proposed bill to the Communities Committee, I believe that the committee has some expertise in the field of nutrition and health promotion. Previous inquiries and its work on other legislation have shown that the Communities Committee has considerable expertise when it comes to the interests of disadvantaged people and that it has the capacity to undertake the proposed consideration.

I ask for the co-operation of all parties in the Parliament to ensure that we undertake the work that we can. Many members applaud Susan Deacon and other members when they talk about consensus and about trying to work together constructively. It is very disappointing for us to abandon that constructive approach on this kind of issue.

The Presiding Officer: The question on those motions will be put at decision time.

Decision Time

17:10

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid):

There are six questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that amendment S2M-4746.2, in the name of Nicola Sturgeon, which seeks to amend motion S2M-4746, in the name of Jack McConnell, on the future of Scotland, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (Ind)
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Watt, Ms Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

AGAINST

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Arbuckle, Mr Andrew (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Glen, Marilyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)

Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Gordon, Mr Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Ind)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Petrie, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

ABSTENTIONS

Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (Sol)
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Kane, Rosie (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)

Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (Sol)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 26, Against 82, Abstentions 13.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The second question is, that amendment S2M-4746.1, in the name of Annabel Goldie, which seeks to amend motion S2M-4746, in the name of Jack McConnell, on the future of Scotland, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Ind)
 Petrie, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)

AGAINST

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Arbuckle, Mr Andrew (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (Sol)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Glen, Marilyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gordon, Mr Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)

Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Kane, Rosie (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (Ind)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (Sol)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watt, Ms Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 18, Against 103, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The third question is, that amendment S2M-4746.3, in the name of Shiona Baird, which seeks to amend motion S2M-4746, in the name of Jack McConnell, on the future of Scotland, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (Ind)
Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)

AGAINST

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
Arbuckle, Mr Andrew (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)
Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
Glen, Marilyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
Gordon, Mr Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
Home Robertson, John (East Lothian) (Lab)
Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)

Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Ind)
Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
Watt, Ms Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

ABSTENTIONS

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (Sol)
Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
Kane, Rosie (Glasgow) (SSP)
Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
Petrie, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (Sol)
Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 9, Against 91, Abstentions 21.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The fourth question is, that motion S2M-4746, in the name of Jack McConnell, on the future of Scotland, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Arbuckle, Mr Andrew (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Glen, Marilyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gordon, Mr Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)

Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

AGAINST

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (Sol)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
 Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kane, Rosie (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (Ind)
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McGregor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Ind)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Petrie, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (Sol)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Watt, Ms Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 65, Against 56, Abstentions 0.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament welcomes the publication of the Futures Project work; recognises the key achievements of the past four years; acknowledges the importance, over the next 20 years, of securing the benefits from our older population, developing and maintaining a strong niche in the global economy and, above all else, promoting a thirst for knowledge and a passion for learning to help secure opportunity for all; notes the opportunities that exist for Scotland, within the United Kingdom, to build on the stability of the current constitutional arrangements, while using devolution to secure a competitive advantage and give Scots a better quality of life, and agrees that the best way for Scottish government to achieve this ambition and deliver a healthy, prosperous and sustainable future for the people of Scotland is to bring its devolved powers fully to bear rather than focussing on arguments over separation from the United Kingdom.

The Presiding Officer: The fifth question is, that motion S2M-4747, in the name of Margaret Curran, on rule 9.6.3A, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees under Rule 9.6.3A that the Parliament shall consider the general principles of the Legal Profession and Legal Aid (Scotland) Bill on the fourth sitting day after the publication of the lead committee report.

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S2M-4748, in the name of Margaret Curran, on a committee remit, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Arbuckle, Mr Andrew (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Glen, Marilyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)

Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Gordon, Mr Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McGregor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Petrie, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watt, Ms Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

AGAINST

Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (Sol)
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Kane, Rosie (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Ind)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (Sol)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 103, Against 15, Abstentions 0.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees that the remit of the Communities Committee be amended to—

To consider and report on matters relating to housing and area regeneration, poverty, voluntary sector issues, charity law; matters relating to the land use planning system and building standards; such other matters as fall within the responsibility of the Minister for Communities; and health promotion and nutrition in schools.

Bus Industry (Accountability)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S2M-4577, in the name of Pauline McNeill, on passengers before profit; greater accountability in public transport. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament reiterates its strong view that decent local bus services are vital to all Scotland's communities and its belief that such services are integral to cutting road congestion and safeguarding the environment; welcomes the significant investment in bus infrastructure, including better terminuses, priority bus lanes and fast track traffic management systems which have received Scottish Executive support throughout Scotland; expresses significant concern that withdrawal of services is continuing resulting in, for example, a much poorer after-hours service in Glasgow, undermining investment and attempts to deliver more integrated and accessible health care and other public services, as well as leaving many areas of both urban and rural Scotland without adequate services, and believes that the Executive and Transport Scotland, in return for the increased investment, should ensure greater accountability of the bus industry for services across Scotland, should undertake speedily a review of how quality bus partnerships are operating and should consider seriously all possible options which could prevent the loss or absence of vital services, including new and greater forms of regulation such as franchise agreements or allowing the new Regional Transport Partnerships the power to determine routes and timetables, so as to guarantee all Scottish communities the bus links which they need and deserve.

17:17

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab): I thank the members who signed the motion. I also thank the Parliamentary Bureau for selecting the motion for the first members' business debate after the summer recess.

I find this hard to believe, because I remember it happening, but 26 October will be the 20th anniversary of the deregulation of local bus services. The privatisation of publicly owned buses was introduced by the Transport Act 1985 and changed the face of how bus services were run in the United Kingdom, with the exception of London and Northern Ireland, which retained a degree of regulation.

Has deregulation served the nation well, or has the time come for change? Deregulation brought about good and bad practices in the industry. It brought about more investment and the use of modern vehicles. More than 100 commercial bus companies serve the Scottish public and we must acknowledge that there have been positive aspects to deregulation.

However, if we consider how the unregulated framework for bus services has worked in practice, it is clear that the balance has swung too far against the interests of the people whom we represent: not just the people who most rely on bus services because they have no choice about using another mode of transport, but the people whom we want to use the bus instead of their cars, as part of a contribution to a sustainable environment—that means us.

Local bus passenger numbers are 48 per cent lower than in 1975, which is surprising. However, in the past six years there has been a year-on-year increase in passenger numbers. We are witnessing growth after years of decline and demand will continue in the future. The national concessionary fares scheme will sustain growth.

Many parts of Scotland are experiencing a loss of service after 6 pm and at weekends. Services have been cancelled, varied or withdrawn. I am a Glasgow MSP, so I cannot fail to mention my support for the *Evening Times* campaign—get Glasgow moving—which is highlighting the loss of services in and around the city and the impact of such service loss on ordinary people. I am sure that other members will describe their experiences of such problems.

There is a brutality to deregulation, whereby consideration seems not to be given to the public service duty as well as the requirement to serve profitable routes. My constituency of Glasgow Kelvin is generally well served by buses, but there are still major gaps in provision and many examples of services being withdrawn or varied without notice. There is no requirement to notify the general public of such changes. In Anderston, Broomhill and Partick in my constituency we have been campaigning for bus services that suit the needs of the elderly and vulnerable population—people who need a bus to take them to the hospital, the post office or simply to visit friends in the community.

There is no duty in law for an assessment of how bus changes will affect members of the public and no duty to consult the public about the services that they actually need. My constituents complain that they cannot travel from the west end to Springburn without changing buses and that the services to hospitals are not direct. Getting information on how to travel is still a bit of a nightmare, despite the investment in Traveline Scotland. In my area, the new Strathclyde Partnership for Transport reports an ever-increasing demand for the replacement of lost services that have been withdrawn by commercial bus companies, leaving parts of our communities isolated. Just think that the public purse is picking up the tab for routes in poorer areas where

commercial companies have withdrawn but are still allowed to compete for the new contracts.

SPT recently ran a seminar in which it said clearly that the answer lies not only in increasing the budget for subsidising routes, but in changing the regime. I agree with that. Every working day, there are a staggering four changes to the bus timetable. The regime is extremely volatile. The open market has been harsh on some bus companies, too. There is a great deal of debate to be had about whether genuine competition exists in all parts of Scotland. We know that there are dominant operators. Competition between operators that run the same services causes overprovision, as well as underprovision on other routes. Some operators choose to cherry pick routes and to serve routes at peak times but not at others—those practices are killing poorer communities.

At present, there is virtually no accountability in the bus industry, despite the fact that one third of bus operating funding comes from the Scottish Executive through the national concessionary fares scheme and bus operator grants. No other industry is so unaccountable. The 1985 act removed the right for users to object to the removal of services. The success of deregulation varies throughout the country. I am sure that people have different views on its success, depending on where they are, but I want change. I believe that change is necessary for the people whom I represent, for Scotland and for the industry. I am not the only advocate of change. I must mention the work of the Local Government and Transport Committee in reviewing the Transport (Scotland) Act 2001. I welcome the Minister for Transport's consultation during the summer, which asked us directly about our experiences.

Unfortunately, I do not have time to outline my analysis of what I think is wrong with the quality bus partnerships and contracts. Suffice it to say that there is not a single quality contract in the United Kingdom, which shows clearly that reform is required. I am sure that operators would agree that we are still a long way from providing the best possible service that connects people easily to where they want to be, with ticketing arrangements that suit them.

I call on the Executive to take powers to make services to hospitals compulsory. I want to add to the work of my colleague Paul Martin, who in a previous debate ensured that transport agencies have the power to provide services to hospitals. We must go further than that. Transport authorities must be able to assess transport needs and have the powers to address those needs. Government must be able to protect its communities if it funds the very services that are depriving those

communities. We need the power to force ticketing arrangements between companies when they cannot agree. We need powers over timetabling if necessary and a duty to ensure that timetables are supplied to Traveline Scotland, which the Executive set up. We may need to consider forms of franchising on a smaller scale. Nothing should be overlooked. We should reinstate the public's right to object to the removal of routes.

Whatever we do, there must be change. The status quo cannot remain and, I argue, we need change very soon.

17:25

Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I declare an interest in that I have a bus pass, which allows me to use buses more often than I might do otherwise, for free. On the ticket that I get are the words, "Scottish free", which I think is a good start.

I welcome the debate. In many parts of the country, people rely on buses as the basic form of public transport. We need to have a review of the lucrative franchises that certain bus services have at present and to extend services to meet people's real needs, not what the bus companies think are their needs.

In my area, I will seek a review by HITRANS with a view to integrating community transport services that are underfunded with commercial bus franchises that are well funded. I will return to that issue in a moment.

I will use the example of bus services between Caithness and Inverness, which is a fairly long distance. Those services are important to allow people to get to a major centre for shopping and other things. The last bus to Inverness leaves Wick at 5 in the evening, while the last train leaves at 4.52. People who wish to leave Caithness for business or pleasure in the evening are not catered for. Folk from Thurso who want to go to Inverness or further afield by bus or train have to take an extra half day to make the connection. Surely better-designed bus services can meet the needs of people in Caithness and other parts of the far north. From Inverness, the last bus to Tain, which is about 30 miles away, leaves at quarter to 11 in the evening and the last bus to Thurso leaves at 18.35. There is a significant cut-off time for people getting to and from the major centres.

Greater integration between community transport, commercial transport and HITRANS is much needed. I welcome HITRANS's granting of stakeholder status to the Highlands and Islands community transport forum. However, it is important that it is given proper funding. The commercial companies, such as Stagecoach and Rapsons, must serve a cross-section of needs at all times in rural and remote areas.

The Caithness transport partnership, through its excellent document, "Caithness Transport Vision", has raised the question of getting the dial-a-bus services for initiative at the edge communities properly funded, so that they can be dovetailed with the commercial bus services. All those issues have to be taken up by the transport partnerships. At the moment, far too many communities and individuals are disadvantaged, compared with the bus franchise holders, which are making a lot of money at our expense.

17:28

Paul Martin (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab): It will be a while before I qualify for a free bus pass, but I hope that it does not take that long to improve bus services for people who are already entitled to a free bus pass. The challenge that the Scottish Executive faces is to ensure that we get best value from the massive, unprecedented investment in free bus transport. More than £0.75 billion has been invested in public transport in the past three years and we must ensure that people get best value from it.

I make a similar point to one that Pauline McNeill made in what I thought was a thoughtful speech: we will have to have some form of regulation to ensure that bus companies deliver best value for money. We have given them the opportunity to deliver a more effective public transport system through quality contracts and various other measures that we set out in the Transport (Scotland) Act 2001. However, I am afraid that my experience of dealing with the bus companies is that they do not want to comply. Therefore, we have to introduce some form of regulation.

The issues that surround bus transport are threads that run through many of the challenges that the Scottish Executive faces. We will not tackle the economic challenges that my constituency faces unless we give my constituents a decent bus service to their place of work. We will not be able to improve health care in my constituency unless we give people decent bus services to their health facilities. There are so many social challenges that face communities across Scotland that we will not be able to deal with them if the bus companies are not willing to face up them.

Pauline McNeill mentioned the issue of the few bus companies that are dominant in Scotland. Will the minister consider making a referral to the Competition Commission to investigate whether the companies are, in fact, dominant in the market? One of the aims of the deregulation of the buses in 1986 was that we would have a competitive market that would provide a wide range of options for those travelling on our buses.

However, in the bus industry in Scotland, certain companies dominate and there is a lack of competition. In responding to the debate, will the minister say whether he thinks that such dominance exists in the market? Will he refer the matter to the Competition Commission?

I welcome the debate that Pauline McNeill has initiated. We cannot continue to talk a good game about tackling social exclusion and improving public transport unless some form of regulation is introduced.

17:31

Ms Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP): I thank Pauline McNeill for securing this debate, which is on a subject that has caused anger in communities in Glasgow and throughout Scotland. I agree with what Pauline McNeill said about the successful campaign that was run by the *Evening Times*—I congratulate the paper on its campaign. We talk about accountability, and the *Evening Times* certainly brought some of the bus companies to account and ensured that the public, at last, got some reaction from them. I look forward to seeing what the Competition Commission has to say about the comments that the public made during that campaign.

I know that the minister has been sent a letter by a constituent of mine regarding the service—or, rather, the non-service—that he received. The motion talks about poor services after hours; Rob Gibson talked about the problem in his area. Similarly, in some areas of Glasgow, there is no service whatever after 6 o'clock, which means that people are stranded and are unable to visit relatives. More important is that people can get a bus to Gartnavel hospital, but cannot get a bus back. Elderly people who go to the hospital to visit relatives have to get taxis back. That is ridiculous, given the subsidies that bus companies receive from the Executive. I would like that to be investigated by the Competition Commission.

Last year, FirstBus made £100 million profit, but what has it done? It has withdrawn services from various areas, including low-level bus services, which are useful to infirm, disabled and elderly people and to people with prams. Limited as those services might have been, some people cannot access them any more. I wrote to the minister on the subject and have received a reply, which mentions that powers relating to such services are reserved to Westminster. That is an absolute nonsense, which we should also consider.

On greater accountability, I will read out part of a letter that a constituent of mine—Mr McGrath—wrote to the minister. This elderly gentleman, who was using a concession ticket, had to wait a number of hours to get on a bus because the

operator told him and the other concession ticket holders who wanted to get on the bus that only people with valid tickets could get on the bus. He wrote:

"I was never so badly treated, or made to feel so demeaned in front of people in all my life by this policy of Control by the bus companies. I assume the Scottish Executive would not accept this is what should happen to Old and Disabled people?"

At the same time as bus companies are failing to provide an adequate service, they are discriminating against people who are using their concessionary tickets, in respect of which we pay the bus companies a lot of money.

There needs to be a review of exactly what is happening with the bus companies. The review can examine the London model or another form of franchise, but there needs to be a review that gets people round the table. It is clear that the bus companies are not behaving accountably. Parliament must legislate to ensure that bus companies are accountable to the public and Parliament.

17:34

Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): I start by congratulating Pauline McNeill. Not only is her motion a good one, but I thought that her speech to set off the debate was well measured and effective. I have no doubt at all that although the deregulation of bus services by the Conservatives some 20 years ago has been helpful for some, it has also been disastrous for many people in Scotland.

Pauline McNeill: The Conservatives are missing.

Mike Rumbles: Pauline McNeill has pointed out that the Conservatives are all missing. I, too, had noticed that: this is such an important issue for the Conservative party that not one Conservative MSP is interested in coming along to the debate. That says a lot. They are not really interested in how difficult the situation is in rural communities—certainly in my area, the north-east, where there are many problems with accessing decent bus services. For the representatives of rural Scotland—which the Conservatives claim to be—to disappear when we have such important debates is unfortunate, to say the least.

In my constituency of West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine, people have little or no choice as far as bus services are concerned. We have the highest level of car ownership in the country, and the reason is that we do not have bus services. I live 3.5 miles from the nearest bus stop. No bus comes near my small rural community.

Carolyn Leckie (Central Scotland) (SSP): That is the length of Mike Rumbles's driveway.

Mike Rumbles: Sorry—was that an intervention?

That means that the four adults in my household—I count my 16-year-old as an adult—have to have their own forms of transport. There is no alternative.

I look to large and growing communities in my constituency, such as Laurencekirk in the Mearns. I see that the Minister for Transport knows what I am about to say. That area is bereft of bus services, and one way of addressing communications issues in the Mearns and in Laurencekirk would be to reopen the Laurencekirk railway station, which would be of huge benefit to the people who live there. I know that the application for that is with Transport Scotland at the moment, and that it just needs the green light from the minister—it has received all the other green lights so far.

The answers to the issues in Pauline McNeill's motion do not lie just in subsidies to bus companies. We are putting a lot of public money into our bus services, so I would encourage the minister to examine all the options that are available to him to ensure that our rural communities in particular get decent bus services.

17:37

Bill Butler (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab): I congratulate my Labour colleague, Pauline McNeill, on securing a members' business debate on a subject that is of such importance to the quality of life of her constituents and that of all the people of Scotland. Like Mike Rumbles, I regret that the Tories are not here to defend the indefensible 1985 deregulation. Perhaps that shows their commitment to devolution.

We have travelled a considerable distance in parliamentary terms since the Transport (Scotland) Bill was passed on Wednesday 20 December 2000. I had been a member for about three weeks when I joined colleagues in supporting the bill's passage. At that time, there was a hope that quality bus contracts and partnerships would improve the bus services that were available to all our constituents. Despite the best intentions on the part of the Executive and, indeed, the whole Parliament—the bill was passed *nem con*—that has not proved to be the case.

In a recent letter from the vice-chair of Strathclyde Partnership for Transport, the case is made for a return not to full and comprehensive regulation but to a

"form of franchise whereby the ... transport authority has ownership of the bus routes, and offers them to companies on a contract basis with conditions that less lucrative routes would have socially needed transport provision."

In my view, that way of proceeding has much to recommend it. It is not revolutionary, but it is potentially a good reform.

As the motion puts it, the Executive should consider

"new and greater forms of regulation ... so as to guarantee all Scottish communities the bus links which they need and deserve."

That is correct. From talking to my constituents and from my constituency postbag, I know that there is widespread and growing concern regarding the continuing withdrawal of services by private operators, with no consultation or thought being given to the negative social impact of such cavalier behaviour.

The experience of the past six years, despite the significant progress that has been made because of welcome Executive support for investment in bus infrastructure, has clearly shown that persuasion in the form of quality bus partnerships is not the answer for the provision of decent local bus services. My constituents are telling me loud and clear that the growing number of withdrawals of bus services by commercial bus companies, leaving many communities increasingly isolated—as Sandra White said—especially at weekends and, in Glasgow, in the evening, is no longer acceptable. They are correct.

The situation has been well documented by the *Evening Times* in its commendable campaign. I recently decided to launch a petition in my constituency to garner support for a change and to allow local people to register their legitimate concerns about the present unsustainable situation. I can tell Parliament that the petition has attracted almost 1,000 signatures in a few weeks, and that I intend to present the petition—I hope with thousands of signatures—to the Minister for Transport at the end of the month.

It is time for the Scottish Executive to require bus operators to provide good services to every part of Glasgow and throughout Scotland at all times in return for the many millions of pounds of public money that they receive in grants, subsidies and reimbursement. Let us seriously consider targeted reregulation and the use of franchising. The need to provide decent local bus services is a matter of elementary social justice. It is time to act to make that worthy aspiration a reality.

17:41

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I congratulate Bill Butler on his excellent speech and I thank Pauline McNeill for securing the debate.

As a regular—almost daily—bus user in Glasgow, I thought about my experience in order

to prepare for the debate. One of my most interesting experiences on Glasgow buses is of being recognised and falling into conversation with other bus passengers. They are often surprised that MSPs do not take taxis everywhere. I am sure that that is a mistake on their part and that many other members are also regular bus users. However, it is interesting that they are surprised, and I find those conversations much more useful and valuable than the average conversation with a taxi driver.

What are the experiences of people who use buses? I accept entirely what Bill Butler said about the withdrawal of existing services, but there is also the question of the quality of existing services. For many years, fares have been rising steadily in relation to the cost of driving, and are far too high. There is often little prior notice when fares change, and people are expected to turn up with the right change—oh, yes, because it seems impossible to run a bus service and give people change—without knowing the fare. There are also periods when prices are bizarre: odd numbers with sevens and threes, and no expectation that people will get their change.

Information is lacking at bus stops. Information about what buses turn up and when should be really easy for bus companies and SPT to provide. The information is not always missing because bus stops have been vandalised, but often because nobody bothered to put it up in the first place. There is also the question of incorrect information on the inside and front of buses, including electronic systems that do not work properly and which show passengers where they have just left rather than where they are going.

As well as routes being lost, some are being doubled up. Some of the smaller operators genuinely add something to the service in Glasgow, but others just hover in front of the FirstBus service in the hope of catching a few stray passengers as the queues lengthen. Such smaller operators do not add anything to the quality of the services.

I also have to say with regret that I have seen appallingly racist, sexist and homophobic behaviour from drivers on Glasgow buses. That is not acceptable.

What is the solution? In the 20-odd seconds that I have left, I do not propose to revisit all the recommendations that the Local Government and Transport Committee made in its report last year. However, some recommendations have not been acted on, and I look forward to hearing the Minister for Transport say when we will see a proper response to the recommendations. Some form of regulation or reregulation should be appropriate, and we should not shy away from that.

We should also remind the Executive that it invests £500 million in building motorways in a city where most people depend on buses to get around because they do not have access to a car. Until we get bus services higher up the priority list, I am sceptical about whether we will see much improvement.

17:44

Mrs Mary Mulligan (Linlithgow) (Lab): I have frequently spoken in the chamber about train services—my obsession with the Airdrie to Bathgate line is legendary—so I am grateful to my colleague Pauline McNeill for giving me the opportunity to redress the balance by discussing bus services, or the lack of them. My constituency—Linlithgow—is not rural in the way that Mike Rumbles's constituency is, but it has distinct communities and some of the villages have significant problems with their bus services, or the lack of them.

Like many members who have spoken, I am disappointed in the results of quality bus partnerships. We had high hopes for them and thought that they would make a difference but, unfortunately, they have not. The bus companies have refused to take the risk. In any discussions that they have had of which I am aware, they have expected local authorities to take the risk, which means that the public purse subsidises bus companies that make private profit. At present, bus companies run only profitable routes and expect us, through local authorities, to subsidise routes that are needed but which are not as profitable.

All the complaints that we have heard this evening are repeated throughout Scotland. I recognise them from my constituency, from which I will give two examples. The X1 express service from Armadale to Edinburgh was a good service on which, for no apparent reason, the times were changed so that they did not suit people who were returning from Edinburgh in the evening. Passengers were not consulted about a service that they thought was successful, although it is frequently run with buses that are old and of poor quality.

In Boghall, pensioners with heavy bags and people with children in pushchairs must struggle uphill to the local supermarket because the bus company will not take the bus into the car park, as to do so would add a minute to the journey. Is that really a reason for not running a service? I hope that the bus company concerned will respond to the local people who are trying to bring that service into line.

I want a bus service that is more responsive to passenger needs. I recognise that private bus

companies are about making profits, but I am not happy to subsidise their profits, although I am happy to subsidise routes that are needed.

A memorable achievement of the Labour-Lib Dem Executive is the free bus pass, but how many constituents tell us that it is no good to have a free bus pass if they have no bus to catch or because there is no service in the evening, at the weekend or early in the morning? I say to the minister that we must take that seriously. The number of members who have spoken tonight shows what an issue this is. If we do not act, further demands, which we will be unable to ignore, will be made for reregulation of bus services because we must offer services for social reasons and for the good of the environment. I hope that the minister will take on board those comments.

17:48

Rosie Kane (Glasgow) (SSP): I thank Pauline McNeill for prompting the debate. Tories are like buses; when we want one, we cannot get one, and when we do not want one, they all come along at once—but there you are.

As other members have said, speaking towards the end of a debate means that everybody has covered the points. As has been said, before 1986, bus services were licensed and regulated by local authorities. Cross-subsidies enabled poorer areas to receive services that would otherwise not have been commercially viable. That all changed after the Transport Act 1985. We were told that privatisation would lead to increased competition, which would lead to improved services and would mean that we required to pay less subsidy. At that time, 75 per cent of buses were in the public sector but, 12 years later, only 7 per cent of buses were under public ownership.

These days, a handful of companies has a huge stake in our public transport and in our buses. It is obvious that deregulation has severely disrupted services and that bus companies are focusing more on their legal duty to maximise profits for their shareholders than on their responsibilities on transport, social inclusion, meeting communities' needs or environmental protection.

Too often, areas are starved of services. As other MSPs have said, we all receive letters about that. Services are withdrawn because they are not profitable and in many areas evening and weekend services have been withdrawn, which leaves people unable to attend hospital visits, to see their friends or to visit family. That isolates people and, with other negative initiatives, is a precursor to forcing people into cars.

There has been ticket-price hike after ticket-price hike in services in Glasgow this year. I cannot remember how many there have been, but

those hikes have not translated into better services around the city—in fact, the opposite has been the case.

It has been pointed out that Glasgow has the lowest car ownership of the major British cities—around 40.5 per cent of households in Glasgow have access to a car—but we want to reduce that number. The Scottish Executive has promised to reduce emissions, but what is it going to do? Recently, Tavish Scott said:

“We want to identify the best mechanism to get more people out of their cars and on to public transport”.

That is absolutely brilliant—it is an excellent idea. Pauline McNeill's motion asks for better terminuses and for priority bus lanes, and she rightly points out that urban and rural areas do not have adequate services.

Patrick Harvie mentioned that the Scottish Executive is willing to plough millions of pounds—probably £500 million—into the M74 northern extension. Imagine what could be done by investing that money in public transport.

Our bus services should benefit the many and should be cheap, clean and efficient, but that will never happen while profits come before people. Unless the minister promises a radical overhaul of the public transport system and a reversal of the deregulated and fragmented service, it will be business as usual, and—unfortunately—it will be bad business.

17:51

Roseanna Cunningham (Perth) (SNP): I, too, congratulate Pauline McNeill on securing the debate and endorse much of what Mike Rumbles said about experience on his patch, which mirrors what I have experienced.

The absence of Tories speaks volumes about their complete lack of commitment to public transport in Scotland. We should make that plain to the rest of Scotland outside the chamber.

I agree with much of Pauline McNeill's motion, although I thought it obvious that she had not been to Perth bus station recently when I read what it said about significant investment in better terminuses. I hope that she will visit Perth bus station if she thinks that there has been wonderful investment in it. Much has been promised, but there is rarely anything suggested in the way of delivery.

Many people come to complain to me and other members about service changes, reductions in the frequency of services and timetable and route changes. My particular bugbear is the removal of a number of express pick-ups to roundabouts in the middle of nowhere that people need a car to reach, which is an interesting development in

many rural areas and is clearly an issue. The result is that the very people one might think ought to be serviced by buses in the first place are excluded as passengers. That must be addressed.

Everybody warmly welcomed concessionary passes, but there are issues relating to them. People thought that they would have hop on, hop off bus services, which they are not getting, and that has led to complaints.

I listened to Patrick Harvie's complaints about Glasgow buses. He ought to come to rural Perthshire. People in huge chunks of my constituency have no buses to complain about in the first place. I could travel by bus from Crieff to Perth once every hour, but if I wanted to travel from Crieff to Auchterarder, leaving aside school buses, I could do so only on a Tuesday, Thursday or Saturday, and not on a Monday, Wednesday or Friday. Many rural bus services are similar. Even when a service exists, it is so infrequent that it is not much use to people. There is little integration of such services, not only with other bus services, but with rail services. A person can arrive at a railway station and have a 45-minute wait until the next train arrives, which is crazy. Public transport is letting people down massively throughout Scotland.

I agree with Pauline McNeill. We must readdress many issues to do with the delivery of public transport and bigger issues to do with how public transport will work in an integrated way for Scotland in the future, which it is not currently doing.

17:54

Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab): I, too, commend Pauline McNeill for securing this important debate. I have been heartened by the growing consensus that decisive action is needed if we are to make lasting and effective improvements to Scotland's bus services.

There is general agreement among members that the wholesale deregulation of the bus industry in the 1980s created significant problems and that the time has come for change, although that general agreement might be because the Tories are not represented in the chamber this evening.

I have lost count of the number of times that I have been contacted by constituents who are angry about unscheduled changes to their bus services, the cancellation of routes or the fact that they have been left isolated during the evenings and at weekends by their service provider. Judging by some of the speeches that have been made tonight, other members share my frustration about that type of complaint.

I want to raise two constituency issues. First, a crucial section has been cut out of a bus route because waiting times at a particular set of traffic lights do not suit the bus company. Instead of making a five-minute bus journey to reach the post office, shops, dentist, library and pharmacy at Whifflet, my constituents in that area—many of whom are elderly—now have to make two bus journeys that take up to half an hour and involve a 10-minute walk between bus stops. Not only is that unfair on my constituents, it is ridiculous considering the geographical area. However, because the bus service does not receive subsidy from SPT, there seems to be little that can be done.

Another issue is the fact that, in the Townhead area of my constituency, no buses are available before 8 o'clock in the morning or after 6 o'clock at night. The area is on the outskirts of Coatbridge. It has a high level of unemployment and a low level of car ownership. The lack of bus services therefore has a significant impact on the local community: it affects access to employment and it prevents people from being able to visit relatives, go shopping in the evening or make hospital visits. It hinders their ability to access leisure and recreational activities in the wider Coatbridge area as well, and it therefore adds significantly to social exclusion.

I wanted to talk about the dial-a-bus service, but I do not have much time. It is a good resource although, unsurprisingly, it is oversubscribed. There are also problems such as people having to wait half an hour on the phone to order a bus, which have to be addressed.

I would have liked to talk about hospital services, as my workload has been dominated by the reconfiguration of accident and emergency services in Lanarkshire this year; however, I do not have time. Suffice it to say that the reconfiguration will create further considerable challenges for public transport in the area and major problems for my constituents.

I recognise the fact that SPT alone cannot improve the situation; it is already operating under considerable pressure and budget constraints. Also, the onerous nature of quality contracts is a barrier to their use, so they are not the answer. I think that we know that, as they have not been used. Undoubtedly, we need more decisive action at Government level to redress the imbalance that has been caused by deregulation. We need to ensure that we put people rather than profits first, where bus travel is concerned. I am pleased to support Pauline McNeill's motion and I await with interest the minister's response.

17:58

Chris Ballance (South of Scotland) (Green): I, too, congratulate Pauline McNeill on securing a debate on such an excellent motion. Decent local bus services are vital to Scotland's communities, and such services are integral to cutting road congestion and safeguarding the environment. Furthermore, the Transport (Scotland) Act 2001 is not working. I call on the minister please to promise to revisit the act and see how we can improve it.

Timetabling frequently does not work to the advantage of passengers. In the past month, I have received letters complaining about services from Biggar to Hamilton, from Lanark to Wishaw hospital, from Lanark to Biggar, and around Dumfries and Galloway. Problems exist with services right across the country.

Timetable information is too often not displayed; it is not available at bus stops or at obvious local venues. When it is available, it is frequently wrong. I have here the McKindless Group's bus timetable for service 31, which serves the Clyde valley. It is an excellent-looking, comprehensive document. It says, "No Sunday services". That simply is not the case; the fact is that there are no McKindless Group Sunday services. However, there is no indication that there are any services apart from what is in this booklet. That situation is replicated across the region and the country. Timetable information needs to be a priority. I have a letter that Alistair Watson of Strathclyde Partnership for Transport sent to one of my constituents that states:

"I can assure you that the provision of information has indeed been at the top of my agenda for quite some time and has been raised by myself with the Minister on no less than three occasions."

That issue must be looked at urgently.

Fares and ticketing integration—which is generally non-existent—is another area in which the Transport (Scotland) Act 2001 has failed. We need some mechanism to ensure that local bus companies integrate and standardise fares to allow for through-ticketing.

The result of favouring the bigger companies and those that offer the cheapest services, which are frequently of the poorest quality, is that it encourages companies—as has happened on many occasions in Lanarkshire—to flood routes with extra buses either to prevent the entry of competitors or to remove the existing operator altogether. Once that objective has been achieved, the quality and regularity of service declines badly and the public are left with a service that is worse than it was previously. That is another issue that the Transport (Scotland) Act 2001 has failed to address and we need to look at it again.

I ask the minister to recognise the strength of opinion that, as has been said, exists among members of almost every party in the chamber. In a range of regions, this is a real problem that needs to be addressed urgently.

18:01

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): I join others in congratulating Pauline McNeill on securing a debate on a subject that I know has been dear to her heart.

Although it seems an incredibly long time since deregulation took place, I remember the images that newspapers carried of the buses in Glasgow's Hope Street, where people could not only not see for the buses, but could not move because so many buses were on the same street simultaneously. Pauline McNeill is right to make us think back to then and to ask ourselves whether deregulation has served our communities well.

We know that local bus services are vital to communities across Scotland in urban and rural areas alike. In some areas, buses are the only public transport available and often act as a lifeline connection to essential services such as hospitals. On balance, my community is not badly served by public transport. We have a great train service. We have a bus service, although it could do with improvement. We even have integration between the two services, as FirstBus services link directly with the First ScotRail timetable.

However, it is clear from listening to members today that there is a problem. We should strive to have the best possible bus services and not simply settle for second best. Constituents regularly raise with me a number of areas for improvement, which are very similar to the concerns that other members have highlighted.

On the issue of quality, buses in some areas are getting older. The most profitable routes are given the newer buses, but suburban routes can be essential, especially where the bus is the only option for public transport. On accessibility, the need for new low-floor buses is felt acutely by disabled people, parents with buggies and older people alike.

Frequency, however, is the issue on which most of the problems arise. Are there enough buses serving the right routes or are the most profitable routes simply picked off? Do all the buses come at the same time? Do people need to wait for half an hour and then watch—usually, it is raining at the same time—as three of them come simultaneously?

Another issue is the availability of buses at night-time and weekends. Throughout Scotland, there are bus-free zones at night-time. In my local

community in Bonhill, such a service was removed but thankfully—with subsidy from SPT, to which I am very obliged—subsequently reinstated. However, the service was provided again by the previous operator. Given that, again and again, the cost falls on the public sector, I am not sure whether that is cost-effective or represents value for the public purse.

Pauline McNeill is right to say that the issue is not just about more money for subsidy. Money should come with obligations. We need to place obligations on bus operators to deliver services appropriately.

In closing, on the basis that good things come in threes, I echo other members in making three suggestions to the minister. First, he should give people the right to be consulted and to have an input into route development. Secondly, he should give them a right to lodge an objection when routes are changed or reduced. Thirdly, he should give them the right to have a reasonable bus service. If that requires a degree of regulation or an alternative franchise model, as outlined by Bill Butler, I encourage the minister to consider that seriously, so that the bus service is indeed a service to all our communities.

18:05

The Minister for Transport (Tavish Scott):

This has been a useful debate that reflects the quite understandable concern about bus services that exists across the chamber and throughout Scotland. I acknowledge Pauline McNeill's leadership of the debate and the fact that members of all parties, except the one that colleagues have mentioned this evening, have taken an interest in the issue.

I want to deal with the three central points in Pauline McNeill's motion: the arguments around greater accountability; the arguments around the need for a review of quality bus partnerships; and the need for better forms of regulation that she and other members articulated this evening.

I acknowledge at the outset that bus services are an essential component of Scotland's public transport system. Buses are flexible, cost-effective, high-occupancy vehicles that provide sustainable mass transport. They assist us in our climate change objectives to reduce congestion and promote both economic growth and social inclusion by providing links that enable people to get to and from employment and to access shops, leisure facilities and public services. Paul Martin has argued before that we should pay more attention to planning our health care services and schools estate in relation to transport infrastructure and services, and I assure members who share that concern that that work is on-going both in the

national transport strategy and in discussions with my colleagues with responsibility for health and education.

Buses are the principal, most frequently used and most widely available form of public transport, and I would like to pick up some of the points that have been made this evening, starting with Paul Martin's point about the competition authorities. As Mr Martin knows, the Competition Commission has considered the competitive nature of the bus market across Scotland on a number of occasions since 1985. Hitherto it has concluded that there is no monopoly, but members who examine closely the situation in their area will recognise that there are probably around eight companies, out of some 300 operators, that share the majority of the bus market across Scotland, so there must be some competition issues. That is one of the matters that I have sought to tease out in the consultation on the national transport strategy and in the specific questions that I have asked of members about the bus industry in their areas. The perception is that there is too much competition in the west of Scotland, driving down the quality of service and standards, and that has certainly come through in the representations, which I read carefully last night.

I will address some of the other points made in the debate. I understand Rob Gibson's points about the far north. I take his point about journey times, because that is the issue that we are addressing in the context of the consultation. The bus route development grant has, and will have, an essential part to play in that, but we also need better management and better communication among public bodies and commercial companies, and we must demand responsive transport in both rural and urban Scotland.

A number of members mentioned the concessionary travel scheme. If there are constituency or regional concerns about the scheme, it is important to ensure that Transport Scotland is aware of the issues and to take up the matter quickly and directly. We will do our level best to sort that out.

Mary Mulligan raised an essential point about buses versus trains. It is a serious point, because in the context of the number of passengers involved and given the contrast between the amount of money that we put into the ScotRail franchise and Network Rail in Scotland and the amount invested in public bus services across the country, there is at least a debate to be had about the Scottish Executive's relative spending in those areas. I will reflect on that in the national transport strategy and in policy.

I thought that Patrick Harvie was a touch harsh on Glasgow taxi drivers, but he can take that up with them, I guess. However, he did make a fair

point about passenger information, and other members also reflected on that.

On the structure of the bus industry in Scotland and what we can do to address the legitimate regulatory issues that members have raised, it is important to recognise—as some members did—that passenger numbers have grown in recent years. Local bus services carried 465 million people in 2004-05, which was an increase of 2 per cent over the previous year. Passenger numbers have grown in the past six consecutive years.

However, there are serious issues to address. The bus action plan that I am having prepared as part of the development of the national transport strategy will focus on specific bus issues. It will build strongly not only on tonight's debate but on the representations that members made in the consultation on the national transport strategy.

I take seriously the points that members have drawn out on all three of the central themes that Pauline McNeill introduced at the start of the debate. In developing the action plan, informal discussions have been held with a range of key stakeholders. We will ensure that the points that arose are addressed when we produce the national transport strategy towards the end of the year.

There is a real need to continue to drive up transport service standards if we are to achieve an aim that several members picked up on this evening, which is modal shift from cars to public transport. I also take the point that several members made that for many the car is not an option as their household does not have a car, so the issue does not apply to many people in both urban and rural Scotland. In that sense, bus services are an essential public investment. We must tackle that properly.

As members have pointed out, the current bus regime is market led with light regulation by local and central Government. The underlying principle that was established all those years ago—that private bus companies are best suited to seek out and develop market opportunities while driving down costs—must be considered carefully. It is the right time to consider the effectiveness of that approach.

Significant concerns remain about the provision of urban and rural services and the basic quality and reliability of transport planning, bus infrastructure and services, particularly in the west of Scotland, as has been highlighted. Concerns have also been expressed about safety, congestion, overcrowding and late running. As part of the regulatory regime, we must examine our enforcement standards and consider what we can do to improve them. Therefore, we will review the policy, financial and regulatory framework

within the bus action plan to examine the appropriateness of current legislation and the implementation of the regulatory regime by all the authorities concerned.

Scottish ministers take seriously and will act upon Pauline McNeill's central three points of accountability, quality bus partnerships and the forms of regulation when we present the action plan later in the year.

Meeting closed at 18:13.

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